

India's National Gay and Lesbian Magazine

PiNK

—pages

vol 05, october 2010

a day in **gay india**

Pink Pages tracks a day
in the lives of gay Indians

Gaytech's latest gadgetry
Upcoming Bengaluru Queer Hubba

the amazing story of **sarmad**

Medieval India's gay saint

Amen: The movie
The Lesbian guide to London

the story of gay **hare krishnas**

And how they're changing Hinduism's largest sects



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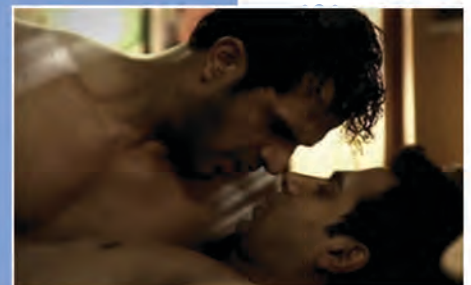
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From the editor's desk



It's been more than a year for me as the editor of Pink Pages, and whenever someone asks me which part of my job I love most, the answer is always the same- hearing from our readers. Whether it's congratulating us on a story you liked, or your feedback on an article you didn't, or your opinion on what's going on around the world, your comments on our website and letters to the editors are always valued.

That's why when we asked our readers to send us pictures for our photo-feature- 'A Day in Gay India', we were overwhelmed by the response. Whether it's you working at your desk, or having a great time out with your loved ones, your pictures speak volumes. They tell us what being gay in India today is all about. Our lives are as mundane and regular as any other straight Indian, but at the same time vibrantly different from the rest of the flock.

Another issue discussed here is a rather touchy one- religion. Many gay people tend to turn Agnostic in the face of virulent homophobia from religious groups. However, there are some, who despite all odds, stand firm in their faith and their God. Amara Das, an openly gay Hare Krishna from the US is one of them. So are some of Indonesia's transsexuals who are devoutly Muslim even as they face the hostilities of an increasingly Islamised Indonesia. As Amara advises, "Do not become disillusioned or discouraged by anti-gay religious leaders and priests...such mean-spirited people would only be all too happy with that outcome."

Udayan
Editor in Chief

(Letters to the editor can be sent to editor@pink-pages.co.in)



1st Anniversary

My heartfelt congratulations to the Pink Pages team, and especially to editor-in-chief Udayan for what has been a ground breaking, never-felt before medium for the LGBT community in India. Looking forward to Pink Pages issues for many years to come!

Rohit Bannerjee

Out at Campus- India's openly gay academicians

In Kusum Ingots vs Union of India, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court had ruled: "An order passed on writ petition questioning the constitutionality of a Parliamentary Act, whether interim or final, will have effect throughout the territory of India subject of course to the applicability of the Act."

However, Prof Tellis' remark is erroneous. If it's not got out of any bedrooms, they why specify Delhi's bed rooms; why are such bedrooms bourgeois? In fact the judgement keeps out all consensual sex in

private bedrooms across India, including Siras'.

Apropos Prof Panikkar's talk – courts can't repeal any section leave alone the Act; Delhi HC has only severed a portion of the application of said section.

Abhay

I myself am an academician and can easily understand the kind of homophobia an educationist or researcher can possibly face in the universities of the Indian sub-continent. The whole Dr Siras saga has been emotionally painful for me. All i can say is that a thorough responsible investigation should be done in order to solve the mysterious death of Dr Siras.

Moreover, as Dr Tellis has mentioned that "377 has not gone entirely anyway outside of consensual gay sex in bourgeois bedrooms and that too bedrooms only in Delhi" does it means that the decriminalization of homosexuality is only limited to Delhi, not to the entire India?

Hadi Hussain

It is true that our society has a hypocritical attitude against gays? Most gays and lesbians are closeted and if one were to attend the secret gay parties they would realise that a lot of their friends too belong to the same group but are fearful to come out in the open. Let any student, middle aged person or even the elderly one deny that they have had some fling with the same sex at some time or the other. Is their conscience clear when they deny such activities? So why be hypocritical and make fun of those who are bold enough to come to the open when you have been a sissy.

Naval

Pink Pages are not so pink, they're often red!

You should write more on these issues. Only when we writers come forward with these kind of sensitive issues, the society will be a better place to live in.

Raj

It's a very touching story. I really respect the courage and persistence of Mr Harish. God bless you!!! May you achieve all you aspirations and dreams in life. All the best.

"Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."-Harold R. McAlindon

Monil Nisar

Trans-cending the Indian LGBT community

You are awesome Revathy. I find a lot of hope in myself reading your story. Thanks for sharing.

Rashmi

The grand old man of Indian gay writing

I might have put the bookstores in Lahore upside down for the anthology Yarana but fortunately I got a copy from a folk and finished it in a single sitting. It was really nice. And I am looking forward to the 2nd edition in which there are literary pieces from Pakistan as well. As far as interview is concerned, I am still insatiate as I want to know more about Mr Merchant's writings. The hallmark of the interview for me was Mr Merchant's statement, "It's better to be made fun of

because of your beard than to be made fun of because they think you're a hijra." I was so much overwhelmed by it.

Hadi Hussain

This interview is my introduction to India's Pink Pages, and I must say that seeing the name of Edmund White both surprised and delighted me. Hoshang Dinshaw Merchant represents a most valuable link to the past experiences of 20th century gay men, not only in India, but also in America and Israel. On the other hand, the insight he can give us into gay or queer life in the Zoroastrian culture, then and now, will certainly be worthwhile. Also, Merchant's comments on the effects of globalization, something we had not foreseen during the American Gay Liberation of the 60's, are nothing if not thought-provoking. Thank you Udayan and Professor Merchant.

Jean Dugas

Dunno Y... Na Jane Kyun!

I am glad Bollywood is taking gays seriously rather than having fun on their sexuality like in Dostana. I recently saw a Tamil movie called "GOA" where two main characters are gays and there is no hiding or any thing sarcastic said about them. In fact there is a love dialogue where one stud suspects the other of adultery and the other guy cries that it is not true and he will die for him etc. In another

scene he asks his friends what is wrong with him and why his lover (the other guy) should cheat on him and try to have affair with another man.

I just could not believe I was watching a south Indian Tamil movie. It was a bold step and a good one. All gay people must see the movie (it is a good movie overall). Hope Bollywood also makes movie giving due respect to gays.

Siva

Truth is the stranger, not fiction

I understand the scary feeling very well as such an incident has happened to me twice—once I lost my gold chain and second time I was beaten up. Both times I managed/ succeeded not to have headed for their sexual interests. The truth is they (such guys) know our weakness that we will not call for help as we are in closet and they can get away with it. You last para -having a friend close by is a good idea that I will follow hereafter. Thanks.

Siva

The Perfect Relationship

Nice one Niket! You remind of a dialogue from Bhansali's Devdas in which Paro said "Pehla pyaar to umar kay faraq ke tarah hota hai jisay cha kay bhi nae mita saktay" I am laughing right now while typing this

comment, it's true that one can't forget his/her first love but it's also true that first love, or the feeling we rate as love, lasts for ever. Especially, the affections we develop during our teens, they are more of emotional rather than practical. I mean do fall in love but be sure what you want and don't waste your time on losers, please.

Hadi Husain

The Advocate

This is encouraging— the gay community is definitely in safe hands with Arvind Narian whose sincere efforts have proved their worth and will stand to prove even before the Supreme Court. Three cheers to Narain.

Siva

Ashamed to be a lesbian? Not any more!

I was terrified to come out to myself when I realised I felt something more than just curiosity for the same sex. After I made peace with that, I was terrified to come out to my friends and my brother. But you are right. It is the most liberating feeling in the whole world. Sometimes I can't wait to come out to my parents, but I know there is a right time for everything and if I rush into it I might just f**k it up for all of us. So I am giving it time. But I know when it happens, I will be at my freest

Esha

A DAY IN GAY INDIA

Compiled by Tushar M

Queer (adj.): Beyond or deviating from the usual or expected

Strangely what was once considered an offensive word for our community has now become the most widely accepted word to describe it; a word that like an umbrella houses everything under it. Be you gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transvestite, intersexed, the word covers it all.

Yet what people fail to realize is that even though the Queer community might appear to be outwardly different from the straight one, when it comes to real life it couldn't be more similar. A brother to someone, a mother, a proud owner of a very cute dog, an investment banker, a student, a servant, a muse, a friend. Even though we might be different, we still have the same lives as everyone else, the same ambitions, same feelings, same emotions, and hopefully one day same rights too.

Presenting **A day in gay India**, a photo feature that shows that even though we might be queer, we're not so very different after all.



"Just another lazy afternoon by the Mumbai seaside...eating gola from the vendors strewn across the beach. Green, red, orange, lime, kala khatta. Flavours as diverse as the rainbow" (Credits- Avneesh Kumar)



"Tanning, swimming, splashing! Fun day by the poolside with my friends" (Credits- Faran Khan, Bangalore)



"My buddy Oscar. I remember the day we brought him home - a tiny curious ball of black fur, jumping around the place. He grew. I grew. And so did our friendship" (Credits- Rohit Singh, Delhi) (left)



Being a fashion student may be called a clichéd gay occupation, but that's what makes a real day for so many of us, like Anshul Pratap Singh from Mumbai! (Right)



"Bold are those eyes with which I see this world. Bold is my kohl which I smear upon my eyes today. Like any other day. Bold. And beautiful." (Credits- Mandar Parab)



"My! was she surprised when both of us rounded her up and kissed her in that crowded pub. Silly times with my best friends" (Credits- Danish Sheikh, Hyderabad)



"New Year night in Nainital. The girl standing beside us was cute. So was the guy taking the picture. You can see the result!" (Credits: Nipun, Ludhiana)



"Working on my laptop on a project at my fourth year level....rather passionately....the title being LGBT Tourism in India: Earning the Pink Rupee. (Credits: Parikshit, Chennai) *(Top left)*

Harish Iyer, noted activist with his 'daughter' Lisa. "Gay men make good fathers! Here is the proof." (Credits: Vijay Sathe, Mumbai) *(Bottom right)*



Men of Faith

ISKCON's openly Gay Vaishnavas...and how they are changing one of the world's largest Hindu spiritual orders

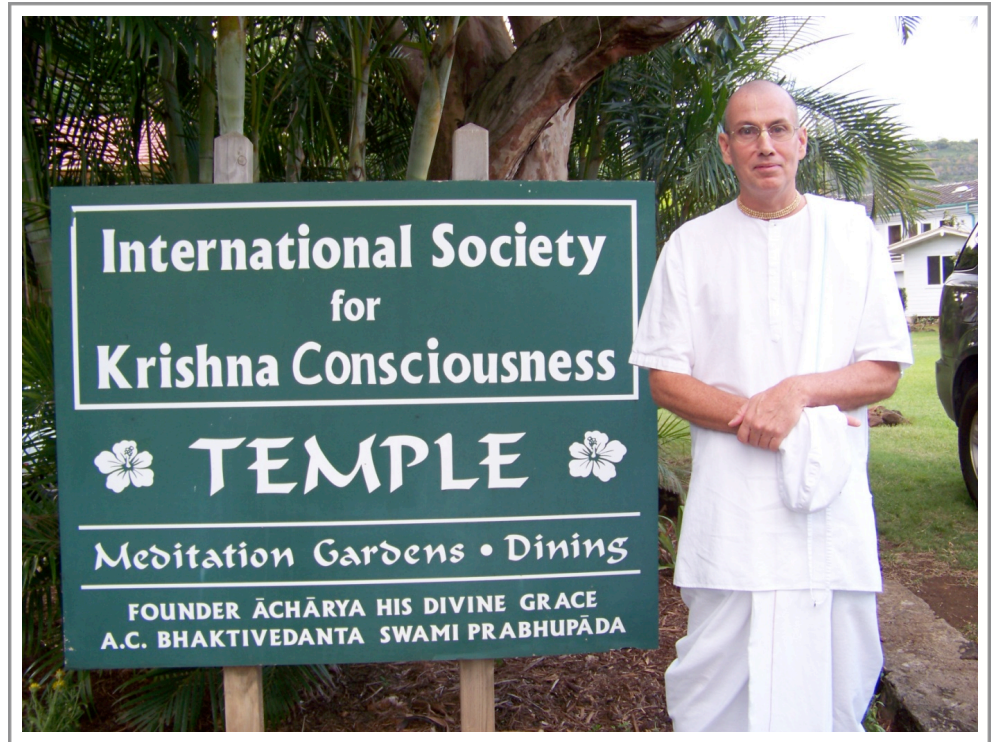
Udayan

Jayesh sounded ecstatic as I talked to him on the phone. He'd just got a new job as a software professional in his hometown Ahmedabad. It meant a new independence for him. For his life has been quite an uphill battle with prejudices and harassment till now.

When Jayesh first came out to his family at age 17, he was promptly taken to Dr. Mrugesh Vaishnav, a prominent psychiatrist in Mumbai. There he was given shock therapy to his genitals and treated for schizophrenia. He was repeatedly given injections of Pentothal, an anaesthetic, which ultimately left him in severe depression. "It was all so painful", he says as he recalls those days of horror.

Things changed for the better once he moved to Nasik to study engineering. Here he heard about the International Society for Krishna Consciousness or ISKCON. Being a religious Hindu since childhood, Jayesh was soon attracted by the society's devotion to Krishna and service to mankind. However, his being openly gay soon became a bone of contention within the community. Though he had accepted brahmacharya or celibacy, he felt like an outcast. That's when he decided to leave Nasik and move to Mathura, the birthplace of Krishna, and one of the holiest places for Vaishnavas.

There he became a part of Gaudya Vaishnavas, headed by Narayan Maharaj, a sect different from ISKCON, which has always shown relatively more acceptance for the marginalized sections of society. Here Jayesh finally found what he was looking for- a free environment as a Krishna devotee,



Amara Das Wilhem at the ISKCON temple in Hawaii

where his sexual orientation didn't matter. His being gay was never frowned upon here.

However, he soon had to move back to Ahmedabad due to family compulsions. He joined the ISKCON temple in Ahmedabad, where his being gay is deliberately ignored, and never talked about. He became a member of GALVA (Gay and Lesbian Vaishnava Association), an informal online group of gay devotees at ISKCON started by Amara Das Wilhem, a devotee from the US. Through that he got in touch with his partner who'll soon be moving over to Ahmedabad. Jayesh admits that they'll have to keep their relationship a secret from the temple, if they hope to continue being a part of the community. Gay marriage is a very contentious issue

at ISKCON and rarely talked about, especially in India.

Amara Das has been an inspirational figure to many gay Vaishnavas like Jayesh. He has authored a book called "Tritiya Prakriti" that is one of its kind book on alternative sexuality and how it's viewed by Hinduism. Hindu scriptures lack the virulent homophobia of the Bible or Koran, but at the same time give an ambiguous reference to homosexuality and transsexuality. On the one hand, all forms of sexuality are equally celebrated or shunned, on the other hand, there seems to be deliberate omission of LGBTs from the Vedic family structure. Amara Das enthusiastically discussed with me his life and his book-

Tell us something about yourself – your early days, how you came to be associated with ISKCON, and your coming out.

I joined ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, a Gaudiya Vaishnava religious organization) in 1974 while attending college at the University of Maryland, USA. I was only seventeen at the time but remarkably drawn to the group's Vedic teachings and culture. I was already vegetarian and a deeply spiritual person. The entire process of

Jayesh faced homophobia both at home, and at the temple

Krishna consciousness fit like a glove; it was just as if I were continuing it from a previous lifetime. I came out to the devotees as gay a few months later. By that time I had established good relationships with everyone in the ashrama and no one seemed to mind. Factually speaking, all were friendly and supportive. In those days, it was well understood that anyone could join Krishna consciousness regardless of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, or whatever. I lived very happily in the ashrama and received both first and second initiation in 1976 from my guru, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada had just established ISKCON ten years prior so the organization was still quite new and growing rapidly in both India and the West.

How was your coming out taken at ISKCON? Have you faced any harassment/discrimination within the community?

I experienced no overt discrimination as a young gay member in ISKCON and lived for many years as a well-behaved and serious monk. Discrimination did eventually manifest, however, in the form of exclusion from marriage and subsequent social

alienation. In ISKCON, heterosexual members that can no longer maintain celibacy are typically given all support to find a suitable partner and marry. Gay devotees, on the other hand, are forced to continue celibacy beyond their means, establish an unnatural marriage with someone of the opposite sex, or leave the community altogether. In hindsight, such exclusion from marriage and the order of householder life (the grhastha-asrama) was an unnecessarily painful experience that kept me in celibacy way beyond anything I now consider healthy or even spiritually correct.

When and how did you come up with the idea of GALVA and writing the book “Tritiya Prakriti”?

In 1997 at the age of forty, after being appalled by some of the ignorant writings of my peers on the topic of homosexuality, I decided to research the topic fully and present my findings

“I was genuinely surprised by all the positive feedback and support I quickly received from many of my fellow devotees—both gay and straight. The hateful backlashes I feared never materialized.”

to other Vaishnavas and Hindus. The endeavor grew rapidly from my initial article in 2001 (the book's first chapter) to a website, support e-group, the formation of GALVA (The Gay And Lesbian Vaishnava Association) and ultimately the Tritiya-Prakriti book, which was first published in 2003. I was genuinely surprised by all the positive feedback and support I quickly received from many of my fellow devotees—both gay and straight. The hateful backlashes I feared never materialized. Only a few rare and clearly uneducated comments were voiced against my new outreach program to the gay community. Silence and approval were the most

common reactions, and I received countless “thank you” letters.

Your book talks about an extensive vocabulary regarding LGBTs, which is missing in any modern Indian language. How do you explain that?

While I am by no means expert in modern Indian language, there is certainly a vast difference between India's ancient knowledge of gender variation and that of the present day. Most modern Indians are extremely ignorant in their understanding of homosexual orientation, transgender identity and intersex conditions so I suppose India's contemporary language reflects that.

From your research, it seems like LGBT people in ancient India were treated as separate but equal. They were treated with indifference as long as they didn't interfere with the more 'routine' heterosexual society.

In general, I try to avoid pinning any one particular view on ancient India regarding LGBT people. Most likely, as in all societies, different views were held according to realization, locale and time. Vatsyayana alludes to this in the Kama Sutra, wherein he mentions how various sexualities were condoned in some regions yet scorned in others. It is safe to say that ancient Indians understood LGBT conditions as inborn, natural and non-punitive but at the same time treated LGBT people favorably, indifferently, or unfavorably according to their own various realizations and tastes. The great Vaishnava king, Virata, for example, was kindly disposed toward the crossdresser Brihannala and valued her presence in his kingdom whereas a ritualistic priest may have looked down upon and sent her away. The former approach is considered ideal within civilized Vedic culture whereas the latter, although mundane, was also present to some degree. In my book I

“While it is true the smṛiti scriptures treat gays as “lower” or “less favored” in a few sparse codes, such regulative standards are easily discarded by Vaishnavas and Hindus with a higher spiritual outlook.”

try to stress the positive examples as far as possible.

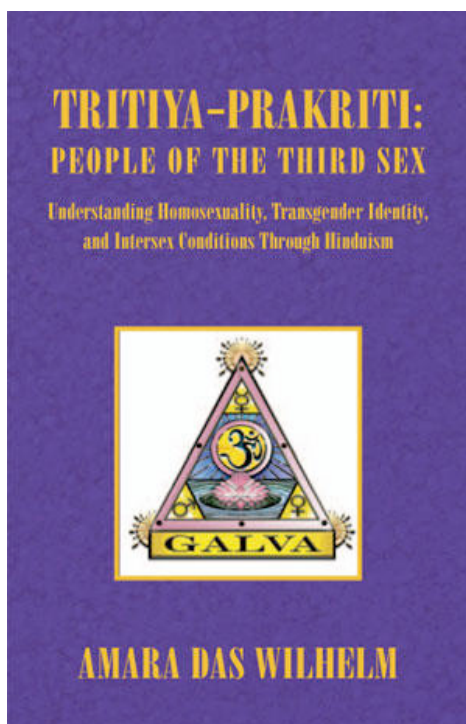
It also seems like LGBTs were actually considered lower to heterosexuals in the spiritual plane- such as Brahmins could not engage in homosexuality, they were barred from family inheritance, could not perform several religious rites and had to live in separate quarters in the cities. Also being born as a third gendered person was considered atonement for sexual sins in past lives.

The references you mention refer to the smṛiti-saṣṭra or regulative codes followed by strict smṛti-brahmanas (ritualistic priests). On the spiritual plane, however, people are viewed equally as spirit-soul and judged not by caste, birth, body-type, etc. but according to their individual character and behavior. Thus, in ideal Vedic culture any gay person of good character would be considered higher than a heterosexual of bad character. While it is true the smṛiti scriptures treat gays as ‘lower’ or ‘less favored’ in a few sparse codes, such regulative standards are easily discarded by Vaishnavas and Hindus with a higher spiritual outlook. The modern reformation of Hinduism is therefore an ongoing process fuelled by progressive spiritual vision. In regard to gays living in separate parts of the city, this was not a forced situation but rather a mostly natural one—just as we find today in modern metropolitan areas and among other ethnic/cultural subgroups. Concerning third-gender

(LGBT) births as atonement for past sins (vikarma), this is true in some cases but not all. The majority of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons take birth as third-gender according to their own particular kama or desire.

Why are the major scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita or the Vedas silent on homosexuals?

Scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita, Upanisads, Vedas, etc. rarely mention gay people specifically (and other minority groups for that matter) because the topic at hand is purely spiritual and bodily differences are of little or no significance to these texts. Their truths and processes apply equally to all. In the Gita, for instance, Lord Krishna clearly states that He is equal to everyone (9.29) and that all people may take shelter of Him (9.32).



Vedic ‘marriage’ rites are very well defined between men and women. Even if one assumes that in a same-sex relationship one person can take the role of a man, and the other of a woman- it is not

true for all gay couples, plus there’s too much labelling involved, and ultimately even gays are having to ‘fit in’ to heteronormative roles. So there seems to be no scope for a Vedic gay marriage.

Gay marriage is mentioned in the Kama Sutra (2.9.36) as follows: “There are also third-gender citizens, sometimes greatly attached to each other and with complete faith in one another, who get married together.” Eight different types of marriage are recognized in Vedic texts and even if there is a question regarding religious marriage, surely the gandharva or celestial type can be applied to gay couples. Indeed, the Baudhayana Dharmasutra (1.20.16) states: “Some commend the gandharva form of marriage for all, because it flows from love.” Vaishnava saint Bhaktivinoda Thakura similarly declares that all people have the right to practice Krishna consciousness and live as householders, even if they are outcastes. While same-sex marriage is currently controversial within ISKCON and Hinduism in general, some priests already accept the practice as a reasonable exception for people with homosexual orientation. Again, on the spiritual platform, it is the qualification of character that counts more than a person’s physical sex or body-type. Furthermore, same-sex couples need not mirror the traditional feminine bride and masculine groom scenario you mention (although some transgender couples may do this). Vedic marriage procedures are easily adaptable and can accommodate any type of couple. In most cases, the foremost challenge is finding a qualified and agreeable priest.

Among the pantheon of third gender gods you’ve mentioned, there seem to be no gay gods. Why is that?

The topic of intimate relations between Hindu deities is very confidential and

not readily divulged. Such topics are for perfected devotees—those who have completely surrendered themselves heart and soul to one deity in particular. While it may sometimes be suggested that a certain deity is entirely heterosexual, bisexual, or even homosexual, this can never be known for sure. The gods themselves are not bound by ordinary rules nor limited to one expression or manifestation alone. What we can know for certain is that God is unlimitedly diverse and the material world reflects the spiritual—nothing exists in this world without some real counterpart in spiritual existence. Furthermore, it is likely that greater information about the gods was available in ancient days but lost over time or phased out due to India's growing hostility toward LGBT people. Such a possibility is entirely plausible when we consider how the Kama Shastric writings about homosexual behavior were similarly almost lost and continue to be overlooked and omitted, even today.

What do you make of Sri Prabhupada's statements on gay people?

Srila Prabhupada's statements on homosexuality are typical for someone of his generation and reflect exactly the attitudes and beliefs held during the British Victorian Era. Personally, I prefer to focus on his higher spiritual teachings such as transcending bodily designations altogether and viewing everyone equally as spirit-soul. After all, I didn't join Krishna consciousness to learn old-fashioned, non-Vedic ideas about homosexuality! Srila Prabhupada's loving dealings with openly gay people such as Allen Ginsberg and his disciple Upendra dasa far exceed in lesson any admitted shortcomings in regard to his knowledge about the third sex ("I do not know exactly...").

Why do you think modern day ISKCON is so homophobic? How is GALVA trying to change that? It took a lot of activism from within the Church of England to make it accepting of gay people. Is GALVA ready for that sort of pro-activeness within ISKCON?

After Srila Prabhupada's passing in 1977 I've noticed within ISKCON a trend toward excessive conservatism and homophobia, at least within many circles. This trend is mostly due to the loss of Prabhupada's pure-hearted guidance and Vaishnava example. Rather than seeing gay people as spirit-souls, many current leaders overfocus on sex and misuse Srila Prabhupada's statements in a counterproductive fashion. Further troubling is the number of leaders that remain silent and allow such mistakes to occur. At the same time I must also say there have been positive examples of leadership and gay outreach from ISKCON authorities such as Bhakti Tirtha Swami, Hridayananda Goswami and other Gaudiya Vaishnava groups like those under the auspices of Tripurari Swami and Srila Narayana Maharaja. Such good examples give LGBT devotees refuge and hope for the future.

Is GALVA ready to help ISKCON become more accepting of gay people?

Yes, certainly, and we have been doing this one person at a time. But acceptance is not something you can force upon any organization. That must come through each person's heart, one after the other, through education, sharing, friendship and love. Sometimes people foolishly assume that GALVA's purpose is to promote sex but that is not true at all. Our purpose is to neither eliminate nor change essential spiritual principles but rather to make them equally available for everyone. The days of creating outcasts are over and the long, golden

arms of Lord Gauranga have come to embrace the world!

In closing, I would like to encourage all your readers to pursue their spiritual interests to the fullest. Do not become disillusioned or discouraged by anti-gay religious leaders and priests...such mean-spirited people would only be all too happy with that outcome. There are many gay-friendly devotees and spiritual guides to help you in your quest, so please seek them out and reclaim your spiritual heritage. LGBT involvement in the religious and spiritual spheres will play a very important role in promoting the favorable, permanent change we need to see in both India and Hinduism itself.

Men like Jayesh and Amara Das are slowly, but definitely changing one of the most influential Hindu movements of all times. How their battle turns out will have a bearing on the lives of all those who're struggling to reconcile their faith with their sexuality, and more importantly, test the inclusiveness and tolerance of the world's most ancient religion.

Transsex and the Javanese City

Michael Lenz



Mariani with her daughter

Mariani is a devout Muslim woman. However, just as the transsexual has not always been a woman she has not always been a follower of Islam. The 53 year old mother of a nine year old, adopted daughter was born into a Catholic family in Yogyakarta in Central Java. But even working as a cook in a Catholic convent couldn't stop her from switching religion. "I always felt attracted by Islam", she confesses. Her love for Allah made Mariani famous beyond the borders of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. Four years ago Mariani founded a pesantren, an Islamic school, for Waria, her fellow transsexuals. It was the tragic 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake killing more than 6000 people and destroying the houses of tens of thousands that inspired her. "Many transsexuals were affected by the earthquake. We raised donations and also organized a prayer event. That was when I realised how many transsexuals are devoted Muslims whose spiritual and

religious needs are not really met by a traditional pesantren."

Every Sunday at 6 PM some transsexual women and gay men congregate in the small room with orange walls behind Mariani's beauty salon in a suburb in Yogyakarta to listen to the teachings of Abdul Muiz, an Islamic ustad (teacher). Interpreting God's word to transgender people does not strike the 33 year old straight Imam as queer at all. "In the eyes of Allah all people are equal."

The outspoken Abdul Muiz is a fine example of the moderate Indonesian Muslims which constitute the majority of Muslims in the archipelago state. The more hardline political Islam, though, has made considerate inroads into the higher echelons of Indonesian politics. The most militant of them is the Islamic Defenders Front. They violently attack everything and everybody seen as "unislamic". Besides western style bars gays and transsexuals are their prime

targets. Also some local Imams have issued fatwas against transsexuals.

The Indonesians have a somewhat ambivalent relation with their Waria. Transsexuals are a staple feature in Indonesian TV sitcoms. In the pre-colonial and pre-Islam era in some parts of Indonesia Waria were seen as a third gender and revered as a wanderer between the worlds. Since many – even Muslim – people on Java still practice animism they have retained a sort of respect for Waria. Mariani says: "I have never ever encountered any problems in my neighbourhood. In fact, the people here support me and the pesantren."

The Sunday gathering at the pesantren is as also much a social event. After the prayers the Waria exchange make up tips and talk about that often not so easy life. Despite funny sitcoms and Animism beliefs many Waria are discriminated against and traditional jobs are usually a no-go-zone for Waria which forces many of them to make a living as musician on the streets of Yogyakarta, singer and dancer in night clubs, or as prostitutes.

Nur is a bit shy. It is her first visit to the Pesantren. She had to leave her village far away from Yogyakarta where she ran a little Warung. "The pressure became unbearable. I had to leave." Nur, who has found herself a job as a cook with a family in Yogyakarta, is warmly welcomed in the little Pesantren community. After the teaching and the prayers dinner is served and over rice, tofu soup and tea Nur and the other girls chitchat and giggle as if they had been best friends for a long time.

Udayan has a tête-à-tête with Rosanna, head of Sri Lanka's LGBT Rights group Equal Ground. An astute and determined lady, she is now at the forefront of the gay rights struggle in that country. Having spent several years in the US, she returned to find a country ravaged by war and hatred. For her the battle for equality is both personal and deeply ideological.

Recently the Sri Lankan Prime Minister gave a public statement saying that he might consider the concerns of LGBT Sri Lankans. Does that make you hopeful for change?

We are always hopeful for change! A lot of hard work has gone into actually getting this response from the government. This year we decided that we must engage the media in our pride celebrations which were over a 1 month period. The positive response we received was really gratifying. All of the newspapers that covered our events and the TV station that supported us throughout pride gave us positive coverage. Key to this was also the support we received from the British High Commission, The Dutch and Norwegian Embassies who directly supported pride financially and in kind. Their presence at all the pride events for example, and here I would also like to acknowledge the overwhelming presence from the US Embassy, also helped make this a bona fide event and a bona fide request that our rights and our issues be addressed.

"There should be no excuse now since the war is over, however there will always be something for people to think that our rights are really not as important as other people's rights."



Had the war been one of the reasons why gay rights were never considered till now? Have things changed for the better since the war ended?

It was never just only the war although that was one of the excuses we always heard. There should be no excuse now since the war is over, however there will always be something for people to think that our rights are really not as important

as other people's rights. No, we haven't seen things change for the better since the war has ended, but there is less tension in the country for sure and there is a serious effort being made to address people's rights. As for LGBT persons, they face the same discrimination whether there is a war or not!

Participants at an event during Colombo Pride 2008

Has the Delhi High Court judgement made any impact in Sri Lanka?

At first we thought perhaps there would be a huge impact, but again, no one other than us, thinks it's important enough. However, having said that, I believe in a way, people do think about that judgement, and do feel that we should follow suit. Unfortunately, these folks are not in the majority! It is just so difficult to engage our government in a way that does not jeopardize anything. But we will always try of course!

How is Equal Ground making a difference? Your group has been very active, organizing fashion shows, and gay pride...

Colombo pride is just the tip of the iceberg really. It is something we do each year to make visible gay issues and the gay community. This year we had the impact we have been working hard to get all these years. We also work in the grass roots mainly, sensitising and educating. We also offer a help line for LGBT persons, we offer legal aid to LGBT persons who require it. We also produce publications which help

educate people and sensitize them to issues. We lobby on legal issues such as 365A (just like your 377) and we provide a safe space for LGBTIQ persons to meet and interact without fear. We hold extracurricular activities at our safe space as well and we are part of the regional and worldwide LGBT movement as well. Our current project involves sensitising, researching and documenting violence against LB women in the rural areas. So we are not just about pride!

What are the main issues – politically and socially- that concern LGBTs in Sri Lanka today?

These are the same issues that have faced us for many, many years... nothing new. Marginalisation, Discrimination, violence...these are

"It is always very difficult for us to do outreach to the Tamil LGBT persons as they are very, very shy to be out or acknowledge their sexuality, even to themselves."

all issues that never seem to go away no matter how much we educate and sensitise. But this unfortunately is the nature of the beast! We just have to try harder, work harder to at least make some lives liveable without the fear and the need to be invisible. If we touch even one person and make his or her life better, then we achieve our goals one step at a time.

Who are you main adversaries?

There are so many, but I would say the extremist religious and nationalistic types are perhaps our biggest adversaries. But they are all over the world aren't they? To a lesser degree our adversaries also come from within our own LGBT community. This is sad to say, but unfortunately true.

Sri Lanka is a pre-dominantly Buddhist country. Do you see any religious opposition to gay rights?

As answered above. Last year we were under threat from Muslim extremists. The Nationalistic Sinhala Buddhist movement thinks that homosexuality is a product of the West. So, no matter how hard you try and prove to them that homosexuality is natural and indigenous, they will think and act according to their will.

What about Tamil gays? Do you think they're being accommodated well within Sri Lankan gay communities?

I think they are, but they are much more closeted and invisible than others. It is always very difficult for us to do outreach to the Tamil LGBT persons as they are very, very shy to be out or acknowledge their sexuality, even to themselves. I hope that one day that will change and that they will join in the LGBT movement of Sri Lanka – as proud brothers and sisters.



Participants at an event during Colombo Pride 2008



Nepal's first gay pride parade in Kathmandu this year

Sunil Babu Pant is the first openly gay politician in Nepal. He is one of five members from the CPN (U) in the constituent assembly, and is also head of the Blue Diamond Society, the only gay rights group in Nepal.

He also heads an LGBT-positive travel agency, Pink Mountains, which provides honeymoon packages for LGBT tourists from abroad.

In a short question answer session with Tushar M

What all legislations regarding same sex marriage are in place in Nepal? How effective has the implementation of the same been?

The marriage law being drafted is at final stage after thorough consultations with many stakeholders including police and religious groups as well. Soon the committee will present this draft

government and then the government will take it to the parliament to pass.

How has the public responded to these legislations? Is there still a degree of scepticism in the society about same-sex unions?

During the consultations many suggested it should be called marriage but few religious groups called it should civil partnership but rights and protection should be same. So the public reaction is positive towards the law.

Do these same sex marriages guarantee the partners the same rights as a heterosexual married couple? What measures is the government taking to implement them and to prevent hate crimes?

In draft it guarantees the same rights but it's still in a draft form and we hope it will remain the same.

Is being openly gay in prominent positions, like you being a member of the parliament, difficult?

No, in fact being out and honest is the most convenient thing I have experienced.

Are there nationwide organisations aimed at queer youth in function?

In most of the places, we have no networks. We are in 40 districts out of 75 in Nepal. Have string visibility but not loud and not on face of anyone. We work with other groups but we are working more closely with local governments than the NGOs or civil society. Recently we have signed the MoU with women, children and social welfare ministry to work on numbers of issues like: drafting new laws to guarantee equality for LGBTI . To sensitize all government departments and to formulate action for government's inclusion plan. Only two days ago the local development ministry issued circular to all the districts to get sensitized on LGBTI matters.

The government allocates budgets to support LGBTI programs. 12th Of September is our 10th Anniversary and we are celebrating it in a big way.

Any future legislations or policies targeted at the LGBT community?

Law Ministry and Women, Children and Social welfare Ministry is working on the amendment of all discriminatory laws against LGBTI and this will be completed by end of this year.

Hadi Hussain

Back in 2005, when I was working on a story exploring the deplorable conditions of intersexuals and hermaphrodites living in Pakistan, I wasn't aware of the fact that there is something like 'Transsexual or Transgender' and that they are different from hermaphrodites. But I took the initiative and educate myself about the dynamics and cultural intricacies of diverse sexual identities living in Pakistan. The case of Shazina-Shumaile came up in 2007 which not only provided me an opportunity to study this issue in detail but also unveiled the blatant and irresponsible faces of media and social/moral dictators of Pakistan. Even having not a single clause in the penal code adequately applying to Shazina-Shumaile, the Lahore High Court still sentenced that allegedly "same sex couple" for three years. However, the sentence was adjourned after the interruption and constant pressure from a senior local psychiatrist and ASR resource center (human rights organization). Recently in May 2010, when Rawalpindi bench of Lahore High Court had permitted Sami Saleem to go through sex reassignment surgery (SRS), I was anticipating the same kind of uncanny response over this historic decision in the legal history of Pakistan where the state has granted the permission for sex change operation to a biologically male but the breaking news got lost as Lahore was havocked with horrendous blasts just a day after the decision. As an aftermath, I decided to pen down this article, especially for the readers of Pink Pages and conducted interviews of two really amazing and resilient transsexuals (Omi and Nenu, both Male to Female) to whom I am highly obliged for trusting and sharing their personal lives with me.

Omi is an undergrad student and challenges heteronormativity through critical social discourse on his blog.

Nenu is a commerce graduate and works for a newsweekly.

You define yourself as a transsexual, how do you relate to it?

Omi: Sometimes I think it was a lot easier when the only word I knew for describing myself was 'zanana', which can be translated literally as 'womanlike man'. It was never fixed for me, and even now no feeling of identity is consistent. Since my childhood, I was sharply aware of my body and people's attitudes toward my gender non-conformity. I just talked, walked and thought differently and then somewhere down the line when I had to deal with issues of acceptance and view myself from the mindset of rigid social order, I felt that I would never be able to live up to the ideals of manhood. Therefore, I consciously started defining myself as a girl in a boy's body. But now, my transsexuality also has a political flavor, whereby I see myself as committed to femininity as a way of being. But, like I said, this has kept changing, and even now I see myself riven with contradictions.

"It helps that both Sunni and Shia authorities have issued fatwas declaring sex-change operations permissible. The question that this may be immoral or "unnatural" has taken quite some of my time, but I now think, aeroplanes, cars, clothes, houses.....everything may be considered unnatural taken in such a context."

Nenu: I feel like having body dysmorphic disorder. My identity is androgynous, neither fit for any gender box nor do I want it to be. It's a matter of distorted body image or whatever that I don't relate to being male. As regards to hair and make-up and fashion? It's a thing I need to learn...but it would only be for

special occasions when I'd like to dress up like a woman.

What were the problems you have faced in your life course due to your identity?

Omi: Mainly psychological and social anxiety. It has gotten better now, but I still remain borderline agoraphobic. At times, I feel prone to compulsions as a way of escaping myself and my social responsibilities.

Nenu: Not many. I guess they will come up when I will dress up in woman clothes or will entertain any such desire. But I will better keep it to myself. I have never behaved effeminately or expressed myself in any such way, publicly. Personally, I am a shy and insecure individual and most of the people regard these traits as feminine. I, although, completely disagree with this notion.

For any one living in Pakistan, family and religion earns a huge amount of space in one's personal life, how do you reconcile with these social institutes while having a non-heteronormative identity?

Omi: Mostly, by assuming an outward heteronormative identity. Isn't that all we can do? As for family and religion, yes those two are very important to me, and that is why, I think, I couldn't shut my family out from my internal struggles. I 'came out' to them as gay, because that was the only label I knew of then. But at the same I also explained my sexuality in terms of a trans identity, reminding them how this was only natural for a girly boy like me. Even now, I find it easier to talk to them if I distance myself from the stigma of same-sex desire, although I do it not by faking heteronormativity, but by telling them that I never intend to act on it, explaining to them how for me the love of God will be enough, quoting Rabia Basri's mystic verse. In a way, I believe it to be true as well, as I find sexual desire very limiting and problematic. In my relationship as well, I am more concerned with the

emotional aspects of it than the sexual, and increasingly, experience lower and lower sex drive.

Nenu: My Family now knows and does not like it, but I do not bother them with initiating the conversation ever. Of course, it does come along when they are trying to pursue me to get married. Otherwise I steer clear of it. The fact is that I do not express myself the way I can, so although I am not being true to myself, I am out of trouble. Religion is not a problem unless it creeps up in my “discussions” with family. Also it helps that both Sunni and Shia authorities have issued fatwas declaring sex-change operations permissible. The question that this may be immoral or “unnatural” has taken quite some of my time, but I now think, aeroplanes, cars, clothes, houses...everything may be considered unnatural taken in such a context.

Did you look for any support and why?

Omi: I look for community. I think there should be a parallel world where I can feel at home, have the feeling of family. A community I can grow old with. Individualism – it's not for me. I think an LGBT community can do this, as most of us 'deviants' here in Pakistan live lonely lives and understand how important community is. I also want to open myself up to people, get out of the mental closet I've put myself in.

Nenu: I did not, although I did make an online friend who introduced me to a local LGBT support group which has helped me loads. I am albeit slowly, getting over my social inhibitions and becoming more confident each day by trying out new ways to express myself whenever I am around them.

Tell us about your intimate relations, how they have been. (And if you haven't any than

what do you think is the reason behind it)

Omi: I've only had one relationship, which is ongoing, though now I call it complicated and see it as a marriage of convenience. It was love for both of us. It not only made me comfortable with my body but also made me accept masculinity; his masculinity and mine own. We see each other as fairly androgynous, although I think an initial issue for the both of us was that we made each other feel like girls. It seems silly now, though. But because this relationship happened outside the context of community, there were two problems: A. I invested too much in it and B. We two are stranded, unable to share our issues with anybody else. My boyfriend is more adjusted in the heteronormative social life; there is huge chunk of his everyday life in which he has to forget all about us, which I find increasingly unacceptable.

“My boyfriend is more adjusted in the heteronormative social life; there is huge chunk of his everyday life in which he has to forget all about us, which I find increasingly unacceptable.”

Nenu: I have never been into any and the reasons are varied. I am an extremely shy and asocial person. Hence I did not ask anyone out and if anyone ever shows any interest in me, I simply freak out. Another reason would be the dilemma in my head, a straight man/lesbian woman would want me as a woman, which I am not, and a gay man/straight woman would want me as a man, the thought of which makes me weird.

Have you thought about the aftermath of your post operation

situation? What kind of problems, if any, you think you will face and how you will deal with them?

Omi: Well, I imagine myself going through SRS in a situation beyond my current family responsibilities. There are some expectations of family and friends that I can fulfil, career-wise. So for now I've basically postponed it indefinitely. When I do go through it, I think there will be a lot of issues, but I don't see how that would be any more difficult than what I've already been through.

Nenu: I do not expect any kind of problems until and unless I am comfortable in my own skin, especially in intimate relationships. As far as social situations are concerned, I have been taking hormone treatment from a long time and still living full time as a man which at times create a socially ambiguous situation publicly.

Recently Sami has been granted the legal permission for sex change operation. Does this decision make any difference to you? Why and how?

Omi: Yes, it does. When it happened, I told my mom all about it. I'm hoping that with the court allowing Sami (who is a proper functioning male) to go through SRS and not telling him to fix his behaviour or take male hormones like my parents have always wanted me to, they would realize that it's not just my 'stubbornness' and fixing really cannot happen.

Nenu: Sami's case is very momentous as now when I would require legal permission, I can use this case as a precedent and have better chances of being granted the same.

Saintly Love

Vikram Tyagi

***“I am sold in the market of love
I know not my buyer, nor my
price.”***

- Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed

Neither did he approve of any worldly comfort, nor did he recognise any maiden's desire. He was no mural of perfection, but then, love in itself is amusingly imperfect. Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed, a Sufi saint, was of a foreign origin and he was Armenian. He was from an Iranian family; some scholars are of the opinion that he was originally a Christian whereas others think he was Jewish. His homeland was Kashan; there was a large Armenian community in Iran of which some were Christian and some Jewish, but he accepted Islam. He came to India with an agenda to trade. All that he treasured in return was a young boy's heart whose enigmatic voice casted a spell on Sarmad's mind, body and soul. The sufi saint discovered Abhay Chand in a poetic symposium where the boy was reciting poetry. He found him to be a perfect truth of divine voice, looks and manners. I dare say this era witnessed love of its kind that defied every limit and rose above the bounds of heteronormativity. The passion picked up like fire between the two and Abhay Chand started living with Sarmad. Here began an affair of love that certainly challenged the ethos of Indian society, but with a difference. Few revolted and few

negotiated. Some pointed fingers and some uttered poison behind their backs. To think of it, the catastrophe would be similar or probably much worse in this 21st century.

Like a true saint, Sarmad showed least botheration. He refused to give away his love for it was priceless. With time, he not only abandoned his wealth but also started wandering naked in streets and courts. Love had played the trick by now. All that Sarmad cared about was the young Hindu boy. He taught him religious texts such as Tauret, Ingeel and Zaboor and enlightened him with the knowledge about God. Everytime the boy recited any of his poetry, Sarmad felt intoxicated with appreciation. Abhay's melodious voice gave a magical touch to Sarmad's poetry and cured him of all his pains. Sarmad's radical transformation post the love-affair, his unconventional behaviour and reservation against reciting the words of Kalima beyond the first two syllables became significant reasons to earn himself a capital punishment.

***“For my crime of loving you
I am dragged into the
marketplace.***

***Noise and excitement resounds,
O come to the terrace
To watch this splendid
spectacle!”***

- Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed



Surrounded with chaos and yet painted with eternity, Sarmad's shrine is located amidst the soulful symphony of Old Delhi. It's juxtaposed with shrine of Sarmad's mentor, Hazrat Hare Bhare Shah and silently breathes under the magnanimity of Jama Masjid. The shrine looks placid from inside and hesitates to unveil much about Sarmad's lifestyle and precisely, his interest towards the same sex. The caretaker of the shrine believes that one can never read the mind of such a saint. Whether Abhay Chand was a reflection of Allah or Sarmad could see a companion in him for real, the world's yet to unravel this mystery. In his lifetime, Sarmad surrendered himself to love and love identifies with nothing but love.

THE PERFECT RELATIONSHIP

By Niket



Niket writes about the ups and downs of young gay love- the trials and tribulations, the joys and tears, in the process discovering just what it takes to make a relationship perfect.

When the flowers bloom again

Though the winters are long yet hope remains, that one day sun will shine again spring will come and flowers will bloom. When we left them last time both Mr. X and Mr Y were just out of their first love affairs, the first ones as they say are the hardest to get over and they did mourn for a long time but the lucid bird of love peaked once again in their lives. This time though it was different from the first, both were more experienced in the customs of the gay community and were for a lack of a better word wiser and cautious from their previous experiences.

Mr X met his guy online once again; oh what a boon the internet is. Can't really fathom what our lives would

have been without it. Anyway, getting back to our tale of the two friends, soon after Mr X became friends with this guy a very near and dear family member passed away. Mr X was devastated by the loss and this guy turned out to be just the thing Mr X needed to get through the ordeal. He was wonderful, supporting and always there for Mr X even though they were not too close when this tragedy struck. Thus they came very close to each other and eventually fell in love.

It is a well-known psychological phenomenon that when two people suffer through hardships together they form a bond between them, and the more severe this suffering is, the stronger the bond gets. This is the reason why people take their dates to joy rides or bungee jumping or sky diving because going through the adventure together strengthens their bond. But the question remains- is forming a strong bond at the start of a relationship enough to have a long and loving relationship with a person or is there something more that is needed in order to sustain the relationship over a significant period of time?

Meanwhile Mr Y had a totally different experience, he was fed up of being in the closet and being ridiculed at school for being gay even when he had tried his best to remain hidden. So Mr Y and this guy from college soon became pretty close friends and on one night when they were supposed to be studying for the next week's exams they began to talk about Mr Y's sexuality and one thing lead to another and soon they found themselves in bed together.

This was the beginning of Mr Y's second love affair, both Mr Y and the other guy became inseparable and though no words of love or relationship were ever exchanged, they

continued with their mutual exploration into this new territory. For MrY this was the happiest he had ever been, as he had a boyfriend who was also his best friend and they fit in well together.

But disaster was to strike soon, MrY and his friend didn't keep this growing relationship between them a secret from their friends, in the beginning they all accepted it at face value but soon after they began raising doubts. Doubts like what will happen if MrY and the guy continued on in this relationship? How will the parents take it when they came to

It is a well-known psychological phenomenon that when two people suffer through hardships together they form a bond between them, and the more severe this suffering is, the stronger the bond gets.

know of it? What will the relatives and other acquaintances think? Remember this was the time when homosexuality was still illegal in India and movies like Dostana were nowhere on the scene. During this time being gay and in a relationship was a big No-No, especially in small cities.

The guy on hearing all these arguments from his friends got really worried and started keeping his distance from MrY. He also started dating girls to appease his friends. MrY tried his hardest to convince him that it was ok and in the end all will work out for the better, but the arguments fell on deaf ears as the guy was convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that being gay was not an option for him and also associating with someone who was gay. Thus they separated but it was not without a spectacular argument and ultimately the brutal murder of the young love that was developing between the two.

Reading the above one may come to the conclusion that the guy MrY fell in love was an idiot and was doomed to live in a loveless marriage, married to a woman while his heart's true desires were never fulfilled, or maybe he will turn to one of those pathetic men who have a wife but also have affairs with men on the side. But can you really blame a guy for

You cannot have a relationship with someone who idolises you and puts you on a pedestal higher than themselves. Relationship is something that works between equals.

looking for the interest of his family and relatives or may be that guy was bi-sexual and can love a woman as much as he loved MrY or perhaps he was just a young boy of 19 years not yet ready to fight the whole society that more or less dictates that the love and affection he feels for other boys is totally wrong and should never be pursued.

Meanwhile Mr X and his guy were having a wonderful time, no identity crisis there. Both were perfectly happy and secure in their identity as gay men and were very much in love with one another. But eventually the honeymoon period got over and Mr X began to realise their incompatibilities with each other, although they were good in lot of things together both Mr X and his guy were polar opposites on an intellectual level. This major difference started driving a wedge between them.

There is old Chinese saying "You should marry the person you love talking to, because several years down the line, their talking skills will matter more than any other skill."

Eventually Mr X realised that this relationship cannot continue any further lest it hurts them even more later on in life. Nothing had changed in the guy who adored Mr X almost to the point of idolization but then you cannot have a relationship with someone who idolises you and puts you on a pedestal higher than themselves. Relationship is something that works between equals. Thus they split up.

How different and complicated relationships are, who knew something that is supposed to be simple and so natural to us humans can have so many facets to it. Once again both Mr X and MrY are single but love did come again in their lives, and may be this time it will stay. Stay tuned, all this will be revealed in the next segment of this article.

"The job of the gay community is not to deal with extremists who would castigate us or put us on an island and drop an H-bomb on us. The fact of the matter is that there is a small percentage of people in America who understand the true nature of the homosexual community. There is another small percentage who will never understand us. Our job is not to get those people who dislike us to love us. Nor was our aim in the civil rights movement to get prejudiced white people to love us. Our aim was to try to create the kind of America, legislatively, morally, and psychologically, such that even though some whites continued to hate us, they could not openly manifest that hate. That's our job today: to control the extent to which people can publicly manifest antigay sentiment."

~*Bayard Rustin* (civil rights activist and gay man who advised MLKjr and organized the 1963 March on Washington)

"What would you do? ...if you were thrown out of your house as a kid? ...if you were beaten up in school and your teachers did nothing? ...if you were fired from your job? ...if you were banned from serving in our military? ...if a landlord refused to rent to you? ...if a doctor refused to treat you? ...if you could not marry the person you love? ...if your kids were taken away from you? ...if the government denied 1,100 benefits to you and your spouse, but not to other couples? ...if the government deported your spouse? ...if the hospital prevented you from saying good-bye as your partner lay dying alone? Welcome To Our Lives. We are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Americans."

~*The Dallas Principles*

QUEER AS DESI

The London diasporic queer

Rohit K Dasgupta

It's been almost a decade since Shivananda Khan founded Naz project London. It was conceived as a safe space for South Asian queer men to meet and socialise. Since then the South Asian queer community has grown by leaps and bounds.

London has always had a very accommodating nature when it comes to ethnic and racial diversity. South Asians have flocked to this city from various parts of UK and some from various other parts of the world. London is also one of the most queer-friendly cities in the world and this has been and added reason for the vast number of South Asian queer identified men and women living here.

One of the men interviewed for this article claimed that moving to

'Back in India, I used to be teased and called "Ladies Ladies" by passersby, at first I took it all but then when I moved here I decided I really did not need to go back to a country where I would be treated as a third grade citizen and so I just stayed back.'



London was the next step for him. Having grown up in UK in what was a predominantly South Asian neighbourhood it wasn't very easy for him to come to terms with his sexuality or even being able to acknowledge it in fear of social and familial backlash. It was only possible for him to express himself when he moved to this vibrant city.

Another respondent claimed that he first moved to London from India some seven years back to study but when he saw how easier it was for him to have

his sexuality accepted he decided to stay back and work. He says, 'Back in India, I used to be teased and called "Ladies Ladies" by passersby, at first I took it all but then when I moved here I decided I really did not need to go back to a country where I would be treated as a third grade citizen and so I just stayed back.'

UK decriminalised homosexuality decades ago, and even introduced Civil partnership Act for same sex couples in 2005, however its post colonial neighbour, India decided to hold on to

this archaic Victorian law until last year. But legalising homosexuality has not made things hunky dory for Indians living here. Often it's the social and religious pressures which do not allow them to express their sexuality. Growing up or living in predominantly South Asian neighbourhoods it is often difficult express one's sexuality. Many fear that the community will not accept them or this will lead to problems in housing and jobs. Even though there are legal implications against homophobia and being discriminated on grounds of sexuality, many fear this will lead to opening a can of worms, something they are afraid of. It is still a popular belief that 'gay-ness' is West born and something 'un-Indian', 'un-nationalistic' and hence it cannot be made a part of the rich fabric of 'Indian-ness'.

Despite the rocky path still deluding the Indian queer, things have definitely progressed. Club Kali has been providing popular South Asian Bollywood music for the South Asian queer community in London and has seen party-goers coming from as far as Scotland just to celebrate their sexuality 'with other desis'. More recently two new Clubs have come up to provide a safe Queer space for party goers- Urban Desi and Habibi, a testimony to the growing South Asian queer populace in London. Most recently the South Asian queer population came out in threes at the London Gay Pride

2010 and provided further visibility for this community.

While many of the respondents for this article were happy going out on the mainstream gay scene, some were very sceptical. They have claimed that the mainstream gay scene is sometimes not as accommodating. They are racially segregated and often name called. One of the respondents think that this might be a cultural clash and often the Indian mechanism of deep rooted scepticism kicks in. "When I told my friends I like white boys, they looked at me in disbelief, as if I was in some way deceiving them or being untrue to my roots. I have never felt any form

While many of the respondents for this article were happy going out on the mainstream gay scene, some were very sceptical. They have claimed that the mainstream gay scene is sometimes not as accommodating.

prejudice or discrimination from the mainstream gay scene but then I guess some people might have and this has made them extra careful," one respondent claimed.

South Asian queerness is very much open and coming out in the public gaze. Most recently, the long running popular daily show- Eastenders featured an interracial queer love story strand which opened up a great number of debates, questions and arguments but it did bring being South Asian and Queer in the very living rooms of the South Asians. Parminder Sekhon, another very well known Queer photographer published a book, 'Red Threads- Queer desi dykes' a photo feature on South Asian gay women in London.

Spaces like Naz Project London which run two successful programs for gay South Asian Men- Dost and Ehsaas and for South Asian gay women- Kiss are hugely popular and provide emotional and social support for the vast South Asian queer populace in London, regularly organising dinners, parties and film screenings as well as fortnightly meetings.

London has definitely provided a blanket of comfort for the Indian queer men and women but the fight is still far from over. As one respondent puts it, 'Legal rights are good but how will that help me if my parents, and society do not accept it, Legal rights cannot force them to accept me.' The road is still long but the Indian queer community has come a long way and the path looks hopeful in the coming years.



Pink Pages are often not so pink, they are Red!

Sourendra Kumar Das



Chapter 2

Pain is sometimes non-transferable and often unbearable, and I realized that when I am held back in the bed for a week, courtesy Mumbai's weather and increasing number of cases of malaria. The cry of my friend rings in my ears, desperately dying to vent out the tale of his sore childhood memories.

I loll in my bed to continue telling the unfinished story of my friend who was born on April 16, not Mr. Chaplin, but our Harish. Eleven years of sexual abuse by his uncle

and hard days in college had made him strong, ripen with experiences.

Everyday was appallingly painful for my friend who was in his late

He shouted back first time when he first was 18 years, winning the first battle towards self-defence. Thirteen years later, he is proud that he could take that step in 80s India.

teens then. He resorted to the last hope in college that came as Professor Lakhbir Kaur who made him the Convener of Literary Events in College. She was interested in a student who would handle cultural events and Harish was perfect for that role. That was the time when his qualities came out like magma out of a dormant volcano. From someone who was extremely shy, he became an extroverted guy.

My friend started participating in debate and other cultural events, also won a prize for beautiful portrayal of love scenes from the

history in a drama competition. Then some other students looked up to him and he too started mingling with other students. At home, things changed as soon as Jimmy moved in. Well, Jimmy was his new found love, a baby German Shepherd.

My friend was always scared of dogs, but Jimmy changed his entire viewpoint. Sometimes, days were so difficult in college and he used to be humiliated by my classmates for his alternative sexuality. The pain was so unbearable that he would come home and put his head in Jimmy's paws and cry for endless hours in the night. He became a huge animal lover from then onwards, and started speaking for animals. He learnt from Jimmy to love them who deserve, and to the evil bark and protest.

One day in college a classmate said, "Aabe dekh gur aa gaya... aaj kiska mu mai lega..?" To that, my friend shouted back at him and said, "So what? Maine to mu mai liya hai. Tere jaisa to har kisi ka nehi leta firta hu...!"

He shouted back first time when he first was 18 years, winning the first battle towards self-defence. Thirteen years later, he is proud that he could take that step in 80s India.

However, the scene at home was so unfamiliar when he revealed the story of his eleven years of sexual abuse by his uncle to his parents. His mother said, "I have seen in TV that this thing can only happen to girls! For God's sake you are my male child...!"

And his father said, "If you are telling the truth why you were silent for last eleven years?"

My friend was shocked and helpless, as due to societal reason his parents wavered to take any major step against the uncle.

It was after several talks and discussions, they finally accepted the truth and now his mother supports him. The only thing he told his mother was, "If your child is hinting you something, being a

mother you should be able to understand that."

My friend's uncle would beat him up during his childhood for not getting an erection; hence he gradually became asexual and

My friend's uncle would beat him up during his childhood for not getting an erection; hence he gradually became asexual and disliked sex.

disliked sex. His true love in life left him forever after four years, and he was left all alone. Jimmy left him at the age of 4 years when Harish was 21 years. During those days, it was fashionable to date girls, so he dated one. He would hold hands in gardens, but discuss boys! After couple of such dates, she told him, "It is not love but friendship."

After college days were over, he realized his sexual attraction towards boys as train journeys were frequent. Thanks to the crowded trains of Mumbai and the secret sports that goes in the crowded compartments. Like any other growing adult, he too would have orgasms, but that he would hate himself when those gory memories of his uncle molesting him would come back. Even though he would get an erection, he would be mentally very upset.

A dear friend called Upen (named changed on request), opened a whole new world to Harish by inviting him to a Gay Bombay (GB) screening at a city college in Bandra, Mumbai. He found out people like him, from his own community who live proudly with their gay identity. However, seeing so many gay guys committed in a relationship made him feel like an outskirt. There was another LGBTI (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender

Intersex) organization that he visited for a clinical test; however the same warmth of GB was overlooked there. Thanks to Upen who played a great influence and the GB group became more like a nice family.

In one of the several trips to Singapore, my friend purposely went to a brothel to have sex with a girl. But alas! He had to close his eyes and fantasize a guy to come close to his orgasm! The first thing he did was to phone his mother and tell where he was and she questioned, "Ok, so you are attracted to girls too, good..." He replied, "No Mom, I am Gay!" She told her to walk out of the place.

Here back in India, this topic was not discussed for long. But one day Harish was so upset for another turbulent day that he walked all the way from Marine Drive to his home in Sion. He felt so disturbed that he did not want to eat. His mother questioned the reason to which he questioned back, "Any man can have sex with a woman. But if you had a daughter would you get her married to a gay man for experiment?"

His mother had tears in eyes and hugged Harish. The second battle in life was won.

The college friends who behaved hard to him made him tougher from inside. The bathrooms of his college in Mumbai had graffiti like, "FOR GAY SEX, CONTACT HARISH @ 2495582*" That was way back in 1995, when mobile phones were not that popular in India. "In our classroom they would write 'Gur ka baccha' with chalk in my seat and the whole impression would be embossed in my pants. My college days were more painful than the childhood days of sexual abuse," sighs my friend.

(This feature will continue in the next issue...)

THE GAY AGENDA

AHAM, THE ME:
CARE TO SHARE!
Harish Iyer

MAKING NEWS
Imtiaz Akhtar

QUEERCAMPUS
INDIA
Team QCI for
Pink Pages

Aham, the Me: Care To Share!

HARISH IYER

It was a crazy summer afternoon. I was out on a movie date with a friend... a friend who I knew since the past 3 months. I picked corner seats, the cozy ones, aloof from the rest of the crowd. Our intentions were definitely not noble. Within a while, the lights went off, the screen was lit and the Dolby was on. My hands touched his, and we exchanged a kiss. His hands moved over my body and I ran my hands over his. He suddenly got scared. He jolted, he shook and he stormed out of the theater. I followed him out. He was crying in the corner next to the popcorn stall. I went over to him. Hugged him, looked into his red eyes and understood something was indeed wrong. I didn't know what to say to him. I did not want to say the wrong thing and cause him more pain. I was scared. I thought it was my provocation that was the reason behind his tears. I watched him in despair and did not know what I should do to show that I cared. I did not say a word, just held his hand...and did not let go of it till he spoke to me. He continued weeping profusely and I just watched him in the dumbness and stillness of loud silence.

That little child had an irreplaceable dent in his mind forever. He grew away from the girls in his class. He never liked the idea of marriage. He always spent time lost with himself ... he grew up to be an introvert loner.



THE GAY AGENDA

He gave me a tight hug and drowned his head in my chest as if he was hiding from the rest of the world. He and I sat gazing at the moon, letting our silences speak. After a long pregnant pause he delivered his first words "thank you". I acknowledged with a nod. He smiled. Took a deep breath and started speaking. And now, he was speaking as if he was possessed. He wasn't bothered of who was watching him cry and swear. He turned pages of his life backwards, to reach the age of 8. He was at home then with his aunt. Alone with his aunt. His parents had gone for an overnight wedding. They were to return only the following day by noon. His aunt, a young 20 something, college going girl, thought it was the perfect opportunity to call her friends' home for a party. She called a couple of her friends and asked them to get booze and cigarettes. They came and the music was set blaring. The smoke engulfed the room. My friend, the little boy, was introduced to all his aunts' friends then was asked to go and sleep in the room. The time passed, and the boy slept oblivious to understand what was happening in his house. As he slept the volume of the music blared. At unease, he woke up in the dead of the night. He walked in the darkness to the loo. He passed by the Hall where he found his aunt getting cozy with her friend. He came back from the loo and when he was on his way to his bed. He was stopped by one of his aunts' female friends. She was scantily dressed. She lowered her cleavage and asked him to touch 'it'. He detested. He was scared, but he obliged. She kissed him and went naked in front of him and she felt him up too. He didn't know what was happening. But he

just knew that he was not feeling nice about it. That little child had an irreplaceable dent in his mind forever. He grew away from the girls in his class. He never liked the idea of marriage. He always spent time lost with himself...he grew up to be an introvert loner.

When he had his first night fall, he was furious and curious at the first feel of sperm. Furious, because he thought he had some female disease and had started milking from the wrong side. And he was dead curious about what was happening to him and in him. Days passed, the issue recurred. He woke up spending time and life in the closet of silence. He wondered why he got aroused thinking of his classmate who happened to be of his gender. While his friends always talked of and stalked girls in the neighbouring school, he would spend time ogling at boys. He found endless joy in just being with that special boy in his class. The days he would get to sit beside him, when his leg would touch his and the days when he would get a chance to brush on him just with no one actually knowing of his innermost feelings...these were the days he would very eagerly look forward to. He was happy on one end, and on the other he was scared and troubled. He had no one to share his feelings. He thought he was different, sometimes he thought he was cursed. He felt special for his classmate, and called him his "best friend". He went from school to college, and they continued to be classmates till graduation. It was at graduation that his classmate started dating a girl. And he felt completely left out. He woke up to the existence of his sexuality amid devastation of losing his beloved eternal classmate,

his best friend to a girl. Best friend is many-a-times, though not always, the nick for a crush, especially when language and understanding is challenged. Like we see in movies, in frustration and the undying urge to find himself and be himself he found refuge in alcohol. He thought his instinct towards men was because of his sexual abuse in the growing years. He was in a state of ambivalence, a state where he wanted to have sex with men and also had a feeling of extreme aversion towards it.

My friend hugged me and cried. For a long time. He confessed to me that meeting me and getting cozy was just because of the similar past of child sexual abuse that we had experienced, something that I was open and candid about. And this was something that actually prompted him to share one of his worst kept secrets with me who was just a couple of chats old. Thereon, I met up with him, everyday. Not to judge or to preach or to support him. Not by kind words or the usual "see positivity all around you" talk, but just by listening. I realized pain is such a binder. And listening is an art. Glad I could listen. That was one of my first memories of counselling... by chance though. Sharing makes a lot of difference...sharing of tears, sharing of joy. I call it the "flint stone effect". Though not everyone can come ahead and speak openly about their bad childhood experiences, the ones who can, if they would, it would help someone find that one friend who serves as a flicker of hope.

...A hope to find oneself in this quest and to realize the power of Aham – the "me".

Making News

IMTIAZ AKHTAR

I on behalf of the making news was the official correspondence, who was sent to the Parliament to cover the debate and report it. My boss had warned me to carry at least an extra pair of slippers, in case there arose a sudden need to retaliate. Anyhow, let us proceed with the summary of the most enthralling debate I ever had attended. The first to speak was one Mr. Muzrim, a member of All India Quam-e-Jahiliya Party who said that, "Homosexuality is a very bad thing, that will destroy the whole society", on being asked how, he angrily retorted because our President thinks so. Next to speak was Mr. Light Carrot, an old timer of Reasonable Socialist Party who ardently spoke about the fact that homosexuality was a "bourgeoisie affectation" and then also said that once we usher an era of stateless and classless society such problems as homosexuality would vanish from the face of the earth. He then pointed out that such thing as homosexuality was opposed to true proletarian spirit and culture. Quoting Levin and Lao he said that such problems have an economic origin. The roots of the problem lie in the faulty mode of

production and distribution. Once we socialize the means of production and distribution, these problems would automatically wither away. Then to debate on the issue was Mr. T.P and a member of the Gandhi Party who eloquently said that, "homosexuality was a form of violence", it is not just a behaviour that is against the

I on behalf of the faking news was the official correspondence, who was sent to the Parliament to cover the debate and report it. My boss had warned me to carry at least an extra pair of slippers, in case there arose a sudden need to retaliate.

dictates of the God but it is against the norms of human society. Nothing could be more abhorrent than a situation where one man vies after the other. Such behaviour is only to be found in animals because God did not endow them with a copious sense of reason. Next to speak was Mr. Sodi, a member of Rasthriya Sanskriti Sangathan who said

that, "homosexuality was a western import aimed to eradicate the culture and traditions of our society." He informed the house that it was a project of the west aimed to "impurify the pure and courageous Aryan race of this great country". He then cited a book written by Prof. Adarsh and published by SCRT, which tendered evidence on the fact that in the good old days, it was common for our ancestors to keep 10-15 wives at a time. This proved that they were not 'napunsak' (impotent), he added. Before ending the speech, he hastened to add that those who dared to oppose his opinions would not be spared. Last to speak was the dhoti wearing, suave, Mr. P. Chamcha, Minister of Moral Affairs, who pointed out that legalizing homosexuality, would lead to lot of law and order problems in this country. Since all our forces are very busy in protecting VVIPs where do we get so many extra forces from, he asked the house in case there is a serious trouble erupting due to these "homos". Then the speaker Mr. Karamchari adjourned the house, till lunch.

QueerCampus India

TEAM QCI FOR PINK PAGES

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual – LGBT. Did this acronym ever feel like a parallel universe? A figment or perhaps a projected reality? Was there a time when you googled ‘gay +India’? Spent sleepless nights reconciling yourself to an isolation you could barely express? Felt the pangs of indecisiveness while attempting to disclose your ‘best kept secret’?

In India, being queer and young can be tricky. We grow up with a jingle of hetero-normativity that glorifies itself, while everything else that falls outside this conventional strait is indemnified or, at most, presented with obscurity, confusion and negativity. Held within confines of the proverbial ‘closets’, many young people among us look towards a parallel universe which, of late, is gleaming with the brightness of Queer Pride Parades sailing through the commonplace streets in almost every major metropolis of the country. So, how do we fill the ‘gap’ between these two co-existing realities? The answer lies in creating a bridge, a support-system at that stage of our lives and at those places where this gap is not only visible, but also, gaping and wide. It’s time to queer the campus.

QueerCampus

QueerCampus India started as an online group on Facebook in April,



2010 to invite support for formation of a queer youth/students’ collective. A few interested youth (and many among us are students), living in Delhi, interacted via this forum, exchanged emails and arranged to meet. As far as Delhi is concerned, we felt that there is lack of a social space where queer youth can interact. There are late night parties, queer pride meetings, Nigah events but either they are restricted to a certain group of people who are involved with them or they take place at ‘unreasonable’ timings that stretch into the evening, night and post-midnight! India lacks a queer youth initiative that reaches our campuses at grassroots level.

The NGOs and other well-established collectives have made considerable efforts in this direction by conducting workshops, managing helplines etc. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has a queer collective – Anjuman. Some of our universities, like JNU and NLSIU (National Law School of India University), have evolved ‘queer youth spaces’ in the form of organizing seminars, talks, and movie screenings. However, one should note that these are initiatives restricted to one particular campus; and also, they have an academic context for discussing issues of gender and sexuality. Presenting a dark contrast, we see that the same issues have been grossly neglected at

THE GAY AGENDA - INITIATIVES

our engineering and medical campuses and in those colleges that have largely remained out of the spotlight.

So, here we have a clearly demarcated need to create city-wise informal forums of queer youth/students which can also be supported by queer community members and other people interested in working with this idea. With pride marches, a host of queer-concern NGOs, collectives, parties, books, LGBT professionals, the Indian queer community is visible, more than ever. But the question is, are such spaces accessible to a queer student? To address the same concern, one of the first initiatives of QCI has been to hold afternoon public meetings in Delhi. We are trying to evolve these meetings as spaces where queer youth/students (and others interested in supporting us) can freely visit and find some rainbow camaraderie! They can interact with a larger circle of other queer students from different colleges and discuss their experiences, coming out to family, friends and other concerns. These meetings also act as a public platform for the group where we

receive a wide range of ideas and support from people. QueerCampus India is not a politics groups. It is not an activist group. Nor do we impose an ideology upon our members. One of our aims is to simply be a democratic group that gives queer youth a space to share and discuss their interests and opinions.

(We have public meetings on 2nd and 4th Saturdays of every month, in Delhi. Updates about our meetings are available at Facebook and our blog)

Another idea has been to be a part of public pride events organized in the city. This year we participated in the commemoration of Section 377 Judgment on July 2nd, 2010 at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. We are also looking forward to participate in the upcoming Delhi Queer Pride and Nigah Queer Fest.

Taking root at campuses

Our campus initiatives are in the phase of being structured. We aim to start slowly, but steadily by popularizing QueerCampus India via putting up posters and organizing QueerCampus public meetings at various campuses. And,

at present, we're looking forward to talk and seek support from different people who can help us to realize the same. If you've conducted college workshops on queer issues, share your knowledge with us. If you are student involved with organizing activities at your college (or a Women Development Cell coordinator at a DU college), help us to approach your campus administration. If you can, in any manner, talk about this group with your lecturers and professors who are interested and involved with this issue, we would be glad to hear from you. Drop us an email at qcampus.india@gmail.com

Moving towards a national collective

One of the aims of having a democratic set-up is also to help this group replicate in various other cities, so as to say, different city-specific chapters of the QueerCampus India collective. So if you want to start up a QueerCampus group in your city please read our blog and drop us a line if you are interested!

Email: qcampus.india@gmail.com

Blog: queercampus.blogspot.com

Google group: <http://groups.google.co.in/group/queercampusindia>

Facebook group: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=116217135068834>

QueerCampus India is not affiliated with any university/college. We are, at present, based in Delhi, and quite enthusiastically open to startup his group in other cities! Mail us!

When In London
...do as you feel like!



TRAVEL

Asiya Islam

If you're lesbian and travelling to London, you're one privileged lady! London, with its liberal and motley mix of clubs, bars and hangouts has a lot to offer to the queer Indian traveller besides the regular tours of the Big Ben and Buckingham. So pack your bags and expect some fine English engagements!

If you are searching for freedom and happiness in the ecstatic city of London, go for a walk by the riverside, go up on the Millenium bridge one night, whiff in the scent of liveliness of London and look around. The magnificent St Paul's will be in front of you, if you turn around you can see the city lights. This bridge which now looks beautifully sturdy has a nickname – the Wobbly bridge. It is reported to have wobbled two days after it was opened, it was closed down for some time and modified. Since 2002, it has been strongly holding up hundreds and thousands of lonely hearts, madly-in-love hearts, broken hearts. My point in telling you all this – whatever you want, London has it for you. You don't have to necessarily spend loads on enjoying yourself; though London is said to be one of the most expensive cities, joy can come cheap if you want it to.

Soho – the most popular gay area of London. The feel of Soho has an authentic charm to it – you can find a small adult sex shop right next to a five storey book store. If you are looking for a jazz night out, Candy Bar that claims to be the 'most prolific lesbian bar in the world' is the perfect option. Fun facts about Candy Bar – it was the first women's venue in the UK to be granted a striptease license, over the years it has been populated

by stars like Robbie Williams, Naomic Campbell and Alexander McQueen! Move out onto St Giles Street and you can find First Out Cafe Bar – London's first gay and lesbian cafe. Apart from the fact that it boasts of a 'pun-a-riffic' name (look again!), it can offer you a delicious cup of organic fair trade coffee or a chilled beer, whichever you prefer!

London is also one of the most multicultural cities of the world – it's worth stepping into a South Asian club just for the thrill of feeling you've stepped back into home! Club Kali (North London) is a well known one, I would also suggest trying Urban Desi (every second Saturday of the month in Anexo Bar) in Farringdon. Hum Tum club nights are relatively new but sound quite promising, check their details on their Facebook page.

But don't be disappointed if you find mostly men in there. For exclusive lesbian events and gatherings, check out The Most Cake 'the chic-yet-undeniably-geeky lovechild of a new generation of London lesbians having their cake and eating it too'. It claims to attract all the progressive, stylish and super-talented lesbians existing! If, however, your travel is oriented more towards an exercise of the intellect, don't despair. Naz group from back home has organised a group called Kiss group in London and holds regular debates and discussions in different venues and sometimes, fun games and drinking sessions!

Maybe at the higher end of expensive holiday destinations, a trip to London can still not be that harsh on your pocket. I would suggest trying to crash at a friend's place while you are

here as accommodation can be expensive; if you think you can afford it, there is no dearth of hotels and hostels where you can camp. Clubs, bars and night outs in London are definitely a thrill, especially if you are here with your lover or friends, but don't forget to explore London by daytime. London has some of the most amazing and famous museums, art galleries and monuments, most of them free to visit. Do get an Oyster card (available at most general stores) when you land in London because it makes it a lot easier to hop on to the tube or ride in a bus and works out cheaper too.

I can promise whatever it is that you expect London to be, you won't find it disappointing!



What to SEE

Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, Tower Bridge, Big Ben, St. Paul's Cathedral, Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus.

Where to HANGOUT

Club Kali (North London) is a well known bar for South Asian LGBTs, Urban Desi (every second Saturday of the month in Anexo Bar) in Farringdon.

Where to STAY

The Soho Hotel (4 Richmond Muse, +44-207-559-3000, from £295) is smack-dab in the middle of Soho, the gayest part of London's west end.

Where to EAT

Momo (25 Heddon St. W1; +44-20/7434-4040; £14-24) located just off Regent St. Is one of the most happening places to eat. Maison Bertaux (28 Greek St, Soho, +44-20-7437-6007; £2-5) lying just off old Compton St in the heart of London's gay village.



A Walk Down New York's Gay Street!



Sutirtho Ganguly

Alright so this article is not entirely dedicated to the gay cruising places in New York City. With that disclaimer I'd tell you know how screwed a trip can be if it's not planned the proper way, which includes the choosing of not-so-creepy snobs to stay with.

I started off the first day with high hopes of covering the maximum possible places listed in the NY city pass. The city pass is indeed a very lucrative way of moving around the city, covering the entire Manhattan on a hop in hop off bus at \$125. You could also take a day's pass on the subway and get a map handy. The streets and avenues are pretty straight forward, you can never get lost. And if you are, there's the yellow NYC taxi that stops when you wave your hand at it (similar to India! That doesn't quite happen at the place I stay in southern Arizona. Here, you have to call and book a cab every time)

I reached the NY Penn Station by taking the NJ Transit from New Brunswick station, where my friend stayed. Times Square was about few blocks away from the Penn Station (near Madison Square garden). Manhattan is divided into two sections – the Downtown and the uptown. Times Square is somewhere in between this. The city of New York is divided into many small villages. You can find the China town (As always), Little Italy, and of course our dear-ol' India in different parts. After collecting my NY City pass from Planet Bollywood, I decided to visit Central Park, American Museum of Natural History (to see the Dum Dum from Easter island), And then I thought I'd take an almost aerial panoramic view of the city from the top of Rockefeller center followed by the Empire State Building. The day ended quite eventfully with me covering the places I desired, but still I couldn't visit Madame Tussauds. Lack of time you see!

The fun started the next day when I had to shift place from New Jersey (i.e New Brunswick) to Long Island near Stony Brook. The journey from NY Penn Station to Stony Brook would take two and half hours one way, which meant wastage of about five hours for just placing my luggage there. So, I decided to carry it with me while seeing places. I wished to visit the Museum of Sex, but never could manage time (Use Wiki to know more, save me the effort of CTRL-V CTRL C). On the way to the financial district, from where you have to board the ferry to the statue of Liberty, I went past the Wall Street, NY stock exchange, the Federal Hall and the Bull. Visiting the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island became a pain in the arse! Why? Well, they told me that they wouldn't allow taking the bag with me even if there was no bomb in it. Rules are rules and there are no exceptions. Luckily, Google helped me find a luggage storage and this further cost a lot for the to-fro journey. I'd regard it as unnecessary wastage of time, money and energy. Anyhow, I came back only to find that the tour to Ellis was closed – it was time! And the ferry to Liberty Island was still open. The lady at the luggage store had told me to take my bag back by 5, otherwise she'd close and then I'd have to collect it the next morning. I hurried through the visit, had a date with the lady of the harbor, clicked quite a lot of pictures with the green rusted copper lady and finally missed collecting the bag.

The next day, I was so lazy to get up. The lady, Maria, at the luggage store, had told me to collect the bag by 8:30 am and she'd not charge for the 2nd day. There was no way I could reach the place by that time, because, if I had to do that, I'd need to get up at 5 am, get ready and take the 5:30 am train to NY Penn station and then run from there in order to get to the store that was located 10 streets and 4 avenues North east of Madison Square Garden. I called Maria and she said that she'd be waiting till about 2. Else she'd close and then I could collect it the next Monday. I had a hard time convincing her about the distance between Stony Brook and NYC, and then telling her

that I'd take a flight back to India the same day. We finally reached after the train stopped quite a while before entering Penn station. Google showed that by walking it would take about 20 minutes to reach the luggage store from Penn Station. I beat that, ran wherever I could without making people suspicious (Quite obvious if you are running all through, people and the NYPD can get hold of you!!) and reached within 10 minutes! A pat on my back!! Maria apologized for being so persistent about closing down because even she had to board a flight to Colombia. Told you earlier, didn't I? Planning is necessary part of travelling.

The last time I had written about the Paris visit and gays kissing and holding hands together. I couldn't spot such things happening in NYC, maybe that's because I escaped going to places. However, the next day my snobbish, finicky Bengali friend from Kolkata, (for whom the world revolved around Kolkata, and he'd compare the Hudson River with Ganges, who'd still regard a \$ as "taka", who'd get all crazy about not eating in restaurants because they could make the chicken in the same frying pan that they had used for beef and what not! Give me a break, god!) did one good thing. He took me to a street that was kind of tagged as a gay one. Thanks to Google, yet again! We entered the Gay Street (Yes! There is a street in NYC with that name). The name has nothing to do with gays. The street is located in the Greenwich Village, named after Sydney Howard Gay. It extends from Christopher Street to one block south of Waverly Place, between and roughly parallel to Sixth and Seventh Avenues.

Christopher Street is the point of interest. There are lots of gay fetish shops on this street. I entered one of the shops just to take a look around. The shopkeeper was an Indian, and he thought I was taking pictures (which I was!) and strictly prohibited me to do that. There was a huge collection of gay porn CDs and DVDs in the shop. Ask whatever you need and you get that there – dildos, BDSM and sadomachism stuff, bondage equipment, cock rings, fucking machines, flesh jacks, vibrators etc. When my learned friend and I were walking down the street, I found many gays hitherto. The gay pubs were the places to visit along the way. They had rainbow flags everywhere. I could notice quite a few white gay couples, holding hands and dressed in pink. Then, there were those muscular straight acting African American gays. We took a walk down to the East river and back. We saw many gays near the river. We dropped the plans of visiting a gay pub, as I didn't like that earlier when I visited the one in Tucson, Arizona named IBT's. I had seen a muscular guy standing in jocks and people coming to him, putting few dollars in his jock and smelling and feeling his dick from the outside. The dance and the music were good, but I kind of got turned off, due to the ambience.

Anyway, back to NY – we walked the rest of the distance from Christopher street to Times Square- It should have been about 3- 4 miles of walk to get back to home from Times Square. Amidst various problems, the NY trip was done and dusted, finally!!



What to SEE

The Statue of Liberty, The Empire State Building, Times Square Visitor's Center, General Grant National Museum

Where to HANGOUT

The Boiler Room, An NYU undergrad (and thrifty hipster) fave, this dive features a pop music jukebox, beers on tap, and a pool table. The Cock 29 2nd Ave. 212-777-6254

Where to STAY

The Bowery Hotel, 335 Bowery (3rd St.) 212-505-9100; Paramount Hotel 235 W. 46th St. (Broadway and Eighth Ave.) 212-764-5500

Where to EAT

Acqua at Peck Slip 21 Peck Slip (Water St.) 212-349-4433 Pearl Street Diner 212 Pearl St. (Fletcher and Platt Sts.) 212-344-6620





GAYTECH'S GIZMOS

By Gadget Guru Gandhi (3G)

Hi everyone! When it comes to electronics, size has an inverse proportionality – the smaller the better. Netbooks are not for gamers and heavy users. These are for office-goers, frequent travellers, students, and for those of you who can't stay away from their laptops and being connected but hate to lug that old heavy laptop with its tacky peripherals along these are what you should surely invest in.

Netbooks have been in the market for quite a long time but only became famous after 2007. Companies started producing more light weight, low cost models so as to attract customers. Netbooks have some features missing like Optical disk drives, remote holder etc. so as to reduce their size; these are not very useful anyways (and if you tell me you really need a DVD drive I'd like to suggest switching to flash media before people start calling you obsolete). Since 2009, due to extra advancement in solid state memories, the specifications of netbooks and notebooks are more-or-less similar. Many prominent companies launched processors specific to netbooks to name INTEL ATOM, CELERON and AMD ATHLON NEO etc.

Some very strong contenders in this field are DELL, ACER, HP and TOSHIBA, so I thought of discussing one from each. All models discussed here are below the ₹20,000 limit (might be a little fluctuation of rates in India)

Dell Inspiron Mini



This is not the best available in the market if you ask me. Though the design is good, they have given it a glossy look which many don't prefer because it easily gathers finger prints.

This also brings in some amazing features such as in-built Wi-max antennae, better keyboard and the maximum battery life in this segment. It has a 10.1-inch wide-screen display has a 1,024x600-pixel, 250 GB HDD, 1GB RAM and powered by 1.6GHz Intel Atom N450. It has some drawbacks also such as wider touchpad which is irritating while scrolling down huge web pages, and the Wi-max which is not exactly a requirement because not many areas have Wi-max available especially in India, so it's no use paying extra for this feature.

ASUS Eee PC



Asus was one of the first to launch into this segment with its Eee PC series. Eee PC series did change over the years but with this one Asus changed its usual chassis, coming up with a new design

that's thin, sturdy, and attractive. They still have the same old 1.66Hz Intel Atom powering the machine but they improved their battery life significantly.

The Metal outer lid and upper body which rests on a plastic frame feels quite tough and sturdy. The keyboard's soft as a feather but the smaller shift and enter keys might give you trouble if you are used to the bigger one. The mouse keys are incorporated in a single bar. The system's performance is in coherence with what you'd expect from this standard set of components – 250 GB HDD, 1GB RAM and standard 1,024x600-pixel display. This is very good for normal usage which includes office work, net surfing and web streaming; HD video shudders a little when played.

HP Mini



With a body made of aluminum and magnesium alloy, the HP Mini felt more rugged than many of the plastic Netbooks it's competing with, and its excellent keyboard layout made typing a stroll through the clouds. Since HP gives you liberty to configure your device, giving specifications for this one is a waste of time; the normal version has all the basic features as that of Dell but has a 160GB HDD instead.



Let's review one more model of HP – the HP mini 311 packing in an 11.6-inch, 1,366x768 screen, as well as NVidia Ion graphics chip, all starting at ₹20,000. Though yet again the RAM and the Processor remain the same the real catch is the graphics card. It provides trouble free HD video streaming and also a decent gaming experience. ■

"office-goers, frequent travellers, students, and for those of you who can't stay away from their laptops"

CULTURE

MOVIES

Amen

Directors Judhajit Bagchi and
Ranadeep Bhattacharya
Cast Jitin Gulati and Karan Mehra
Rating ★★★★★

Amen is an Indian English Short Feature Film written and directed by young duo Bengali directors Judhajit Bhagchi & Ranadeep Bhattacharya and presented by Valentina Erath and Harish Iyer. The cast sees Jitin Gulati and Karan Mehra while the music is composed by Jonathan Fessenden. The movie was recently screened at New York Film Festival last month.

The poster depicts a part of the renowned Michelangelo fresco portraying the Genesis with the tagline, "Life does not let you choose your parents or your sexuality."

AMEN's title is bold as the film is about the sexuality of two bold Gay Men. God created Man and said Amen that reflects his own divine form. That divinity is within a man and that reflects in his innermost quality to Love another man. However, one drawback of the film is that the title is not explained well throughout the storyline of the film.

The short film is a complete male film, as it is enacted by two male actors and directed by two male Bengali directors. The film touches my heart as the directors have got the actors to bring about an appreciable performance. They equally complement each others' body language and indeed looks like men made for each other in heaven. Karan was definitely on the softer side; it is Jitin's performance that registers. The love story has a Karan Johar type happy ending, that can be decided by the audience whether they find it realistic or not.



AMEN makes two characters meet, experience hope amidst confusion, explore truths about their sexuality, their self and delves into the profound meaning of life in the continuum of its trifles.

Thanks to thousands of complements from our audiences. We feel this answer we would like to know from the audience rather than we answering it as it is the audience who can say if Amen has given more to them.

I found the cinematography to be excellent with a good background score and definitely a fantastic location of a furnished artistic house that's adds to the bold love-making scene too.

The movie excellently portrayed internet hook-ups (that's most prevalent in the gay world), rape, incest, child abuse, trust issues, love and of course homo-sexuality. The film accomplishes all of that without sounding like a documentary!

The filmmakers have managed to make a powerful commentary about a gay man's life, fraught as it is with uncertainty. It also depicts loneliness, fear, mistrust and anger through very intimate portrayal of the characters of Andy and Harry.

Jitin and Karan essayed their roles without any of the self-consciousness that one might associate with such a bold endeavour by two directors at the start of their career. Amen carries a number of powerful messages and is bound to be of interest of the large gay and bisexual community that exists in India. This movie might help many gay guys in India to come out and accept their alternate sexuality. A must watch for all audiences.]

The story behind the story of Amen

When Judhajit and Ranadeep were in search of a story, they chanced upon the true story of Harish and decided to make their debut with a short film on the same. They, along with Harish, went on a hunt for actors to play the parts of Andy and Harry, which in itself is a whole story for another film, and after much anguish managed to find actors Jitin Gulati and Karan Mehra, who had the courage to say yes to their bold gay roles with a bold love-making scene. Hats off to the actors like Sanjay Suri in My Brother Nikhil and Jitin Gulati in Amen or John who showed his butts in Dostana (supposedly a movie that brought awareness of the gay community in drawing rooms).

The production began and stalled as soon as they had started making the film because they had run out of the funds which they had raised. They were lost and did not know what to do next. Harish, in his usual style of declaring his anguish on twitter and facebook, screamed aloud and wished there was someone out there who could help them out.

Valentina Erath, a young Austrian, who was randomly following Harish and did not know him from Adam's called him up and asked him what his film was about. When Harish told her what it was about, Valentina took his bank account number and sent

him another Rs 30,000 that vanished in no time while the unit was not half way through production.

But Valentina, who is a single working girl in Austria believed in Harish and by now Ranadeep and Judhajit as well, and continued to cut costs at her end by avoiding to buy say an extra outfit she needed, or a pair of shoes she fell in love with while window shopping, but did not give up on sending them funds piecemeal, for them to complete the film which eventually cost them Rs 3,00,000.

How the sets were put up with two walls and props were got borrowed from friends is another tale and the list of interesting trivia goes on and on which the director, actors, presenters and the rest of the team tell you at the end of the screening while you sit glued to your seat because you are unable to rise from it after the 23 minutes 45 seconds short film ends.

Amen, which starts with Andy and Harry meeting for the first time physically after a brief interaction in an online gay dating site, moves into an expression of sexual angst from Andy, who is in denial, and a display of sexual comfort from Harry, who is free from fear of any disclosure about himself, both who have dared to share a few moments of physical and emotional pleasure with each other without ever having met before.

The scene of their bold fully bare-bodied love making is in your face, which is perhaps, why, so many actors refused to play their parts, despite ironically both being parts actors would rarely ever get the chance to play.

How Harry heals Andy physically and emotionally and sets him free literally and figuratively is what the rest of the 15 minutes of the film achieves seamlessly through the most sensitive storytelling by the directors that one sees coming from any Indian film maker in the recent past.

As a matter of fact, it would not be fair to compare Ranadeep and Judhajit with anybody other than their own peers, because there is nobody on the scene who had the guts and the courage to tear forward with a narrative as they have done with Amen.

Both Jitin and Karan have portrayed their parts with conviction and understanding. As actors, they have set themselves free with confidence and faith in the script. Both actors in their performances as lusting gay partners at first and happy lovers at the end, cut past the gender divide and make you feel the power of love above everything else through their chemistry.

With Amen you can see the emergence of an Indian cinema to which the scale of the making is irrelevant while exploring depths and that cannot be stopped because it is impressionistic and does not require a whole industry to hold it up as technology had provided it with a freedom to explore itself without dependence on anybody else but a bunch of guys on the same page.

With the stories behind the scenes of Amen, you know that there are people in this world who will back art for its own sake because they believe in the intention and realize its potential to change this world which is so lacking in sensitive content because it is so hugely trapped in a business run by those who only seek returns.

Review by Sourendra Kumar Das



Tête-à-tête with young director Judhajit Bhagchi

What's the storyline like for Amen?

The World Wide Web brings the two protagonists, Andy and Harry, together on a nonchalant afternoon. Andy, the suave and rich urban banker stands in a place where he should not ideally be while his counterpart, the soft-spoken, overtly humble Harry, stands tall and firm and is completely rooted where he is today. Both have different hopes from the destined meeting. Their interaction brings out questions that need to be answered, truths that need to be accepted and a life that stands to be reckoned.

AMEN makes two characters meet, experience hope amidst confusion, explore truths about their sexuality, their self and delves into the profound meaning of life in the continuum of its trifles.

What's in Amen, that's not in other queer films?

In India, though gay as a theme is now a hot and sensational topic, but mostly in media, gays are stereotyped and superficially explored where they end up being misrepresented as being pansy, effeminate and frivolous. Amen on the other hand tries to explore the humane side of the issue by focusing on the greater truth that: "Life does not let you choose your parents or your sexuality". The film connotes a greater message in terms of boiling it down to basic choices that people should have in terms of leading the life in their own way.

What's the cinematography like?

The cinematography is done by our friend and DOP Varun Sud. We had kept a mood light for the whole film where in lieu with the story, the lighting also becomes brighter as the film progresses as the characters unfold and the complexities of their lives start untying.

As a director what were the fun moments that you had while shooting for the film?

Being an independent short film, we had the pressure of shooting the film in the span of two days and hence it was really stressful. The fun moments would really be the moments after each take as it was a task in itself to see two straight guys play intense gay characters on screen.

Do you think Amen being a short film it has more to give to the audience?

Thanks to thousands of compliments from our audiences. We feel this answer we would like to know from the audience rather than we answering it as it is the audience who can say if Amen has given more to them.

What do you feel is the gay scene in small towns and villages in India? Are the audiences as liberal as metros like Mumbai and Kolkata?

Of course the gay scene is much better in the urban context mainly after the High Court Verdict but irrespective of this, it is still very difficult for a person to come to terms with his sexuality in India because of the Indian societal baggages and family expectations of a straight life. So irrespective of the

urban and rural divide, what matters most is the individual's coming out to himself rather than to the society. And this is exactly what Amen is about.

How easy or difficult was it to select the cast for Amen? How important is the looks of an actor for a film to attract audience?

Casting was difficult since we were not getting good actors to play the bold character of a Gay Guy in the film. The problem was that in Amen the characters are not pansy or over the top. Harry and Andy are normal people whose sexual orientation is not straight. Hence it became more difficult to find actors who would want to play a straight looking gay guy because they immediately equated it as a taboo to their career. Initially Harish Iyer was supposed to play Harry but during the rehearsals, he completely broke down as all that had happened to him in his real life as a child came back to him on the reel life. He could not handle it and hence we had to cast someone else. We are ever grateful to Jitin and Karan to having agreed to play this part.

Message to young filmmakers like you.

Believe in your dreams and work hard towards fulfilling them

What you should expect from Amen?

A humane story about two gay men and the choices they make. ■

CLASSICS Mysterious Skin



Mysterious Skin is a moving film, disturbing and beautiful and painful. The film follows the lives of two teenagers Neil and Brian, who were molested by their league coach ten years prior and

are each struggling to deal with the ramifications of what they went through. Let me make it pretty plain: Mysterious Skin is about what it feels to be a victim of a paedophile. It's one of the best films for giving the viewer a sense of the fear, confusion and guilt that might follow such abuse. It's not a how-to manual for the molesters.

The film splits into two parallel narrative tracks, following Neil and Brian separately. Neil's story is more serious and developed, involving his journey as a male prostitute. A prostitute not for money, but in an attempt to duplicate the intimacy he has had with his coach. Brian, on the other hand doesn't remember a thing and is convinced that he was the victim of an alien abduction. While Neil engages in increasingly dangerous sexual behaviour, Brian attempts to track him down, the boy in his nightmares.

The film's style is very personal, frank and honest. Everyone has their own limits about what they can watch, and the film will doubtlessly offend some, but I found it terribly powerful. There's a mounting sense of dread as you see where it is heading. How much the director is going to show, you wonder.

Review by Ratnesh



Sumathi says, "There is gender neutral Sufi poetry and there are musical compositions where the gender is not clear". Then, it seems as if queerness is in interpretation of the listener while the emotions remain undiluted!

"Oh, it wasn't anything 'natural' as such.." Sumathi Murthy replies, when I asked her if it was an inborn interest that led her to pursue music. Her mother spotted the talent and she started learning Hindustani classical vocal music when she was nine. Reminiscing about her guru, Late Pandit Ramarao Naik, under whom she trained for 16 years, she says that it was through his guidance that she cultivated a passion for this art. He revealed to her a thrill of discovering new things and discovering them again and again, until it translated into an effortless enthusiasm. "Music is like your lover",

her teachers taught her. She adds, "Learning music is like being with your lover, you think about music and you are engaged in it at each and every moment".

She started performing Hindustani classical vocal music from the age of 12. Her performances have spanned across different cities like Mumbai, Mysore, Gulbarga, Bidar, Kolkatta, Thiruvananthapuram, Pune etc, and various prestigious festivals like Savai Gandharva festival at Hubli, Flights of Fantasy Ganjam Nagappa festival and Sacred Music Festival at Bangalore to name a few. So, does she still perform at these festivals? "No, not anymore" She says. For the last five years, she has been experimenting a lot with different music genres and the above-mentioned spaces are more or less, conventional. So, her drift from these spaces was only inevitable, and so is her excitement as I drift our conversation

toward her creative explorations!

Mentioning some of her work, she talks about her research on Thumris wherein she studied the 'gender issues in music'. Women have been performing this art for a long time; she depicts stories of these women and how they subvert conventions. She feels that it is important to bring out such issues. Last year, she scripted a play called "Sanchari" based on Raag Kalyani that portrayed its entire history of around 800 to 900 years and was produced as a tribute to the 100th birthday of her guru, Pandit Ramarao Naik.

And, of course, there are myriad ways in which her experiments with music take

colors of the rainbow! One such instance is her work with Dr. Floy (a French Bass Guitar artist) on a project called Sakhiri- a multi media show of mixing genders, electronics, visual images, poetry and music. While in 2005, she worked as a composer, singer and lyric writer in the conceptualization of this collaborative work, more recently in 2009, she also helped to add more fusion and queer music tracks to it. Queer music? The term does stump you; however, Sumathi says, “There is gender neutral Sufi poetry and there are musical compositions where the gender is not clear”. Then, it seems as if queerness is in interpretation of the listener while the emotions remain undiluted!

In fact, as a part of Sakhiri, she also helped in conducting a workshop for Hijras in Bangalore, which helped them to write and compose a song on their life and struggles. Following the same thought process, unmistakably, one cannot miss Sumathi’s work with a host of NGOs on issues that include not only gender and sexuality, but also, women’s rights, health, hygiene and environment. She has composed music for documentaries, written scripts and articles on social issues and worked as a coordinator on various projects.

Sumathi started cultural activities in LesBiT(a support group for lesbian, bisexual and trans persons in Bangalore). Her association with Sangama(a sexuality minorities human rights organization) has been a long one; in the past, she was a part of advocacy division of the organization, she organized a theatre group for Sexuality Minorities in Sangama, and worked as coordinator for various projects based on lesbian/bisexual/trans (LBT) women. “You cannot live in an ivory tower”, she says, “You have to get down and look at the realities around you and work towards making the situation better”.

“You cannot live in an ivory tower. You have to get down and look at the realities around you and work towards making the situation better”

Among all her creative endeavors, she is passionate about composing music. And, when quizzed about what’s in store for the future- music direction, for film, is her prompt reply! “I have always been interested in directing music for a movie..however, the details are still being worked out”, she says. And, what about her favorite Hindustani music artists? “I like them all...it’s not about a person, it’s about their music that you listen to and enjoy”.

Opposition and disagreement- yes, she has faced them too. But, they are more related to the other conventions of gender, caste, religion, and communalism that her music may have defied. She quotes her experience in an article on Tehelka. She may not have faced the same on ‘queer’ aspect of her music, perhaps because people are more accepting or because she performs in niche spaces. However, she believes that it is important to bring forth issues such as gender and caste in public; and at the same time, as far being queer is concerned one has every right to be open and expressive about it. And, she is doing just that!

She performed at the Nigah Queer Fest in Delhi, in 2008 and more recently, at events preceding Chennai Pride, 2010. However, she doesn’t note any difference between an LGBT and a general audience. “Wherever I perform, I’m still a musician and I’m still queer”.

That brought me to the last question, regarding her twin identities as a lesbian and a musician. However, I felt that the answer was quite evident. For Sumathi, they are more than just ‘twin identities’; they are intermingling identities that diversify into colors of the rainbow and yet, dissolve together like tones of a raga.



Hicham Bouzid, Germany based Moroccan writer, has done what many would think thrice before they did it. During times when every other writer knows he or she has to conform to certain standards and keep in view the sentiments of majority so as to guarantee their security, he wrote "Kafavis' Syndrome" a book on the "Odyssey of a Bisexual Muslim", non-heterosexuality still being a taboo in our cultures. Born in the city of Rabat during the 70s, before writing Kafavis' Syndrome, Hicham worked in the Agriculture and Industry in Italy and it was there that, after reading Kafavis' poetry dealing with the work of Homer, which inspired Hicham to come up with his book. A writer himself, it was reading which helped him in overcoming the exhaustion and exasperation of insomnia depression. Nuwas Manto interviewed Hicham Bouzid, specially for Pink Pages.

NM: The name of your book Kafavis' Syndrome sounds heavy. Where did you get the inspiration for the name from?

HB : Well, it doesn't sound heavy at all. It was like a code through which I wanted to tell the readers about the homosexual theme of the book. The first title was Dairies of a Homophobe Homosexual, but the publishing house asked me to change the title, so that was all the best I could do to keep the message.

NM: Your character in the book is unwilling to accept his sexuality and believes that it's a curse of God upon him which he must overcome. Do we find your own struggle reflected in the story of your character? Was it same

way for you to accept your sexuality or were you totally okay with the minute you realized yours?

HB: The book is semi-autobiographical, so some parts are me, some have nothing to do with me, but it has a lot to do with the Morocco I lived in.

"The book is semi-autobiographical, so some parts are me, some have nothing to do with me, but it has a lot to do with the Morocco I lived in."

NM: Do you believe that in an age where the child is more concerned with internet games than the pleasure of Greek Mythology, a book can make a change of attitude towards the topic it deals with? Is a writer as influential as he/she was before the advent of internet and gadgets?

HB: No matter what comes, even if we conquer the whole universe, and set up outposts in every galaxy, our heritage will always be reflected in our daily life. As to the Internet, or anything that comes and breaks our previous habits, reading remains the utmost of them all. It lived, it lives and it will live

NM: As a writer yourself, which what other writers inspired you?

HB: I read a lot, so it is not easy for me to say what the influences are. I adore every writer who can in small novellas give the message many can't do in bulky trilogies.

NM: What has been the reaction of Muslim community regarding the book? Any fatwas yet? Did it get you worried that you might be risking your security?

HB: Well, it will be very stupid for anyone to risk his life for a novel telling a story. The fatwa now has become the mere lynching of a person. I remember two heads of state: One who suggested the changing of Mecca to Jerusalem for the annual pilgrimage, a sin not to be forgiven; the other who wanted to eternalise his person, adding some verses to the Coran. Strange enough, they are considered to be the shields of religion. I did neither. I wrote a book to open a healthy discussion.

“Pakistan made the nuclear bomb following India. Will it be clever enough to change a paragraph of persecution following India's example?”

NM: It is still hard to find Muslims who are LGBT and can balance between their religion/culture and sexuality, although there is definitely a growing trend of LGBT positive Muslims. As a bisexual Muslim man yourself, how did you reconcile your sexuality and religious beliefs. I ask this as it's still a very core issue regarding the acceptance of LGBT Muslims.

HB: It is not easy for anyone to accept his sexuality, having lived in a world where everyone would look at you with derision and contempt. The best way is to seek the right friendship, the family you can't since you don't choose yours! How to balance those three elements- religion, culture and sexuality is not easy. But if your mind is clever enough to create a balance, then lucky you!

NM: Your final words to the LGBT Youth and the readers of Pink Pages?

HB: I only recently came across Pink Pages, and it seemed interesting. I am glad for the Indian people that they have overcome such an unfair law. It is only the beginning, though. Tolerance needs more than to change a law. I hope the same for Pakistan. It made the nuclear bomb following India. Will it be clever enough to change a paragraph of persecution following India's example?

Constantine Cavafy



The poet hidden in his poems

*Near the brightly lit window
of the tobacconist's shop, they stood
amid a crowd of people.
By chance their gazes met
and hesitantly they half expressed
the illicit longing of their flesh.
Later, after several anxious steps along
the pavement –
they smiled and gently nodded.
Then the closed carriage...
the sensuous mingling of their bodies;
the hands, the lips coming together.*
Sensuous, filled with passion and longing,
and often culminating in fulfilment, the
poetry of Constantine Cavafy elicits a
variety of emotions in its reader. All of his
sensuous poetry is centred on chance
sexual encounters that are decidedly gay.
C P Cavafy is not as popular with Indian
readers as Wilde or Forster, but we must
consider the fact that he did not write in
English. He was a Greek gentleman who
lived in late nineteenth and early twentieth
century Alexandria, Egypt, and wrote in
Modern Greek. He lived a quiet
clerical life, away from the limelight of
published glory. So much so that little is
known about his life that his poetry
doesn't tell us. Born into a rich family
whose fortunes dwindled soon after his
birth, he moved along with his family
from England to Alexandria at a very
young age. He worked as a clerk in the
Public Works Department and produced
a body of excellent poetry when not
working.

*His clothes were in terrible disrepair.
He wore the same suit all the time,
a faded cinnamon-coloured suit.
Ah, days of summer, nineteen hundred
and eight,
your vision of him, for beauty's sake,
omitted that faded cinnamon-coloured
suit.
Instead, your vision preserved him
just as he was taking it off, casting
away
that unworthy clothing, and the
mended underwear,
and he stood completely naked, flawless
in his beauty; a miracle.
His hair uncombed, tossed back,
his limbs lightly tanned*

*from those naked mornings at the baths
and on the beach.*

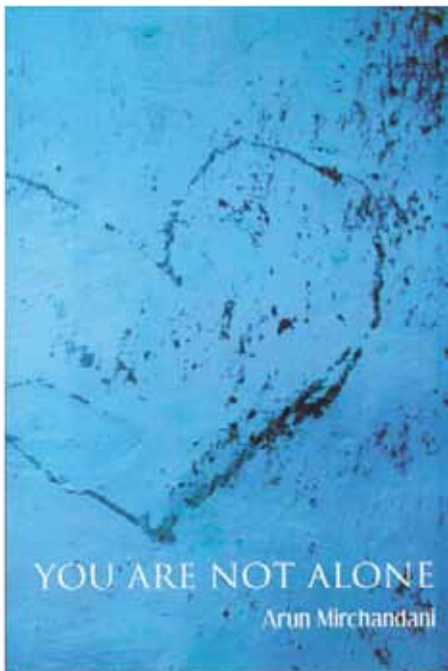
His poetry is by turns descriptive, emotive,
sad and cathartic. While once dealing
with a handsome face seen on a ship
which had hence faded from, at another
point it deals with undying love, and at
another, with a quickie in life's alleyways.
But it is a mistake to think his poetry is
confined to the romantic or sexual
encounters. He also deals with mytho-
logical and legendary themes from
Ancient Greece. From Cavafy's pen have
also come such enduring philosophic and
moral poems as Ithaca ("...And if you
find her poor, Ithaca won't have fooled
you. Wise as you will have become, so full
of experience, you will have understood
by then what these Ithakas mean.").
However, with an anticlimactic feeling
this reviewer read the entire collection
with no trace to be found of the story of
Alexander and Hephaestion.
During his lifetime, Cavafy enjoyed the
admiration of such greats as E M Forster,
though he only published a few of his
poems in local periodicals. His first
collection of about 154 poems was
published posthumously. The following
poem of his perfectly summarises what he
has given us through his body of poetry.

*An old man, stooped and spent,
crippled by the years and by excess,
walks slowly across the alley.
But as he enters his house
to hide his wretched state and his old
age,
he muses on that share of youth he still
claims.
Young boys today recite his verses.
His fancies pass across their waking
eyes.
Their healthy, sensuous minds,
their muscular, smooth limbs,
are stirred by his vision of beauty.*

For readers who aren't fortunate enough to
find the book on a local bookshelf, these
must-read poems are available online for free
at <http://cavafis.compupress.gr/>, and also at
www.cavafy.com.

You Are Not Alone

By Arun Mirchandani



Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone. To not be alone is the only respite we seek the most. And this has been perfectly captured by the semi-autobiography of one of the emerging writers on alternative sexuality – Arun Mirchandani.

This is the story of Sanjay Sanghavi, an urban Indian homosexual counting last few minutes of his life. This is the story of a man who looks back his life spanning over 75 years and explores different facets such as heart-break, rejection, ragging, discrimination, coming out and homophobia. The book is his story of self-discovery amidst numerous downs. Sanjay is 4 years old. His parents are anxiously waiting for his turn for the interview outside the principal's office chanting 'Om Namah Shivay'. Later when by hook or crook Sanjay made into it, they go for the shopping. Sanjay makes a big show for a ghagra choli. As soon he tried it on, he ran out of the changing room while Rajiv, his brother looked in amazement and his mom stood next to the changing room door holding back tears.

"You ugly piece of blubber"

"You fat fuck'n faggot"

"Yu good for nothing moron"

These were the words which echoed in his ears if he dared to look in to the mirror. How depressed he was, hated by all and unwanted by everyone, used to ask questions to himself which had no answers. Only he knew how wrong he was. Sanjay, luck by chance, joined a public speaking course which was a life changing experience, a total turnover.

I am fat? so what?

I am asthmatic? so what?

I have had failed relationships. So what?

I have struggled with relationships at home. so what?

I am slightly effeminate. so what?

I am gay. so what?

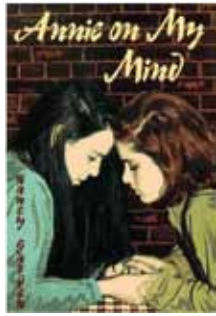
Al that matters is what I have now. And I have confidence in me being me. I am what I am and that makes me happy.

Today Arun is 21 years old. He comes out to his best friend Dinu who introduces him to two vices – drinking and sex. Thanks to menforboys.com, Sanjay Sanghavi meets all sorts of guys in the store. Great kissers, bad kissers, terrible kissers, small sized, medium sized, large sized, foreplay lovers, foreplay haters, inexperienced, vanilla, kinky, muscled jocks, average executives, He had sex in a movie hall, in a car, at a gay party and in his parents' bedroom.

The book is made up of little incidents that make Sanjay's life gay. In spite of all the setbacks, he came out stronger and exhibited optimism with each situation only with the help of the people around him. Sanjay's story is the perfect illustration of an individual making the most of his closest relationships to create a constant illusion of not being alone. A truly inspiring must read. You are definitely not alone.

Annie On my Mind

By Nancy Garden



First published in 1982, Nancy Garden's *Annie on my Mind*, is a lesbian, teen fiction. It's a book which, even after more than 25 years, feels like something that is tailor-made to address the first rush of 'queer' emotion we ever feel in our lives.

Eliza Winthrop is a high-school student at a private school named Foster Academy, in Brooklyn. On a visit to Metropolitan Museum of Art for working on her project, she meets Annie Kenyon. Annie goes to a public school and lives with her parents – a bookkeeper and a cabdriver – and grandmother in a lower-income part of Brooklyn. Though they have different backgrounds and goals in life, their first meeting could be described as a sort of 'friendship' at first sight. They go out for picnics, visit museums and continue to meet while their friendship grows more intense and transforms into love– a love that they do accept but cannot describe. The story moves forward with a backdrop of various incidents at Eliza's school, homophobic teachers, a forced 'coming out', unexpected sources of support and of course, love and intimacy.

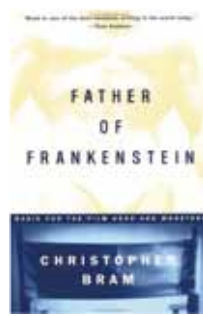
The book, for its most part, is Eliza's 'flashback narrative' while she is trying to write a letter to Annie, in response to the numerous letters that Annie has written to her. Nancy Garden's writing can hold on to your pulse and there's never a dull moment. For some of us, going through the book can feel like reading the pages of an old personal diary. For teenagers, the book offers a relatedness of experience on a personal level, which makes it a must-read!

Annie on my Mind puts forward a basic premise that being gay is not only about sex; it is about love. The book was banned and even burned, at a school in Kansas followed by a court trial which was settled in favour of Nancy Garden. However, can time or bigotry ever overpower a premise that beats like a relentless passion in millions of hearts?

Review by Ananya

Father of Frankenstein

By Christopher Bram



'Father of Frankenstein' is a fictional biography of James Whale an iconic Hollywood movie director. Penned by a renowned American novelist Christopher Bram, a name hard to be missed in the global LGBT literature community, Bram's novel is considered a uniquely executed fictional work which has brought an imagined

story out of a real person's life. While the timeline of the plot spans merely one week, the author has keenly taken the liberty to dive in several indelible memories of the Protagonist's mind. The plot portrays the last week of the James' life and his eventual death. His mysterious death has been nagging the world for a long time (and still is!) and that precisely is the basis of the plot.

I should confess that I felt lost at the start of the book, mostly due to my ignorance towards James Whale and the movies he had directed. But by the time I was finished, I realized that the story was indeed engrossing, much revealing with occasional sarcasm laced narrative, and in fact was touching (especially towards the end). Written in a simple dialect of American English, the author has poured in some remarkable images from James's early life in his native continent as well as his immaculate tenure in Hollywood, and this gives the book a classic feel. With a third person narration in present tense, the author looms into the past both through the narration and through James' reminiscences. The plot has other important characters – both fictional and real life – such as Clayton Boone or Clay, Maria and David. Clay holds almost the same weightage as James does, and his portrayal is done in such ways that he sounds as real as James. Also, one can easily distinguish the novel is much different from other LGBT works; the story and its classic finesse makes it blur the boundaries of gay-straight readership. The novel is the basis for the Hollywood movie *God and Monsters* (released in 1998), and after the success of the movie the novel was renamed as *Gods and Monsters*. The movie had bagged several awards including the award for best screenplay in Oscar awards. Though the screenplay was a modified and improvised version of the novel, it is certain that the central theme and the same emotions had been delved in the film with same impressive ways.

Review by Arjit Gupta



THE

OUT

News, Views...
with a bit of
booze!

Daniel Radcliffe on OUT's cover



Daniel Radcliffe posed for OUT magazine's August issue. Talking to Our Lady J on the tabloid controversy and dating a transgendered person in general, he said, "I think to a certain extent, there would be a stigma -- it depends on which person you're talking to. But I certainly think in this day and age it would be less of an issue. I was on the [Harry Potter] film set when all that tabloid stuff happened with us hanging out last year and none of my friends gave me shit about it. Nobody took the piss. And the film set encompasses groups from every area of society, and I have to say it's a pretty good cross-section. There was certainly no stigma."



In a Sea of 9,000 Gay Games Athletes, 1 Pakistani (Imported From Scotland)

The single-person representation of Pakistan at the Gay Games in Cologne, Germany, which kicked off this weekend, comes in the form of badminton player Ahmed Azeem, who lives in Scotland and has dual Scottish-Pakistani citizenship.



How gay is that?



South Korean special forces pose for photos before a military exercise



Finally, a real gaydar! An application on Apple iPhone uses global positioning system (GPS) technology to track down gay people and help them meet one another. The iPhone application - Grindr - uses the iPhone's GPS system to let its users see a list of other gay men in the vicinity, and also provides vital statistics such as height, weight, age, ethnic background, and even a photo, New Zealand Herald reported.

Lady Gaga rules MTV Video Music Awards 2010



Pop star Lady Gaga took the MTV Video Music Awards by storm as she won in eight of the 14 categories in this year's event. The categories in which Gaga took the moon man home are Video of the Year, Female Video, Pop Video, Collaboration, Dance Video, Choreography, Editing and Direction for her album 'Bad Romance'.

Bob's World comes out!



Bob's World: The Life and Boys of AMG's Bob Mizer is the first book to celebrate the full color, uninhibited second half of the iconic photographer and filmmaker's career. Mizer spent 48 years making photos and films for his Athletic Model Guild and 41 years publishing Physique Pictorial, America's first, and most explicitly gay, physique magazine.

Gay Saudi Diplomat: 'I'll Be Killed If I Return Home'



The life-threatening peril that gay asylum seekers to Western nations face if they should be deported back to homophobic nations has brought GLBT equality advocates head-to-head with immigration policies, but not sparked much mainstream interest. Now, a Saudi diplomat who says he is gay has made the claim that if he is sent back home, he will face death.

Repeal Of Don't Ask, Don't Tell Don't Pass The Senate



On Tuesday, gay/lesbian advocates were dealt a setback when The Defense Appropriation Act of 2011 was shot down by the Republicans in the Senate. All Republicans, including both Democratic senators from Arkansas, Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor, voted against the bill. Recent polls show that 75% of American's believe that Don't Ask Don't Tell should be repealed.



Judge overturns California's ban on same-sex marriage

A federal judge in California struck down the state's ban on same-sex marriage, ruling that voter-approved Proposition 8 violates the U.S. Constitution —

handing supporters of gay rights a major victory in a case that both sides say is sure to wind up before the U.S. Supreme Court.



Happenings

DELHI

GAY DELHI SUNDAY SOCIALS

Sunday

A weekly social gathering for gay and bisexual men. For more information on venues and timings and to know about other gay events in Delhi, join the GayDelhi email list by sending a blank email to gaydelhi-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

THE DELHI FRONTRUNNERS AND WALKERS

Sunday

A weekly running/walking club for Delhi's LGBTI people. For more details email frontdel@gmail.com

MUMBAI

GAY BOMBAY SUNDAY MEET

Sun, 6:00 pm

JATC (Just Around the Corner) Bandra West. Entry free. For more details, visit the [GayBombay](http://GayBombay.com) website.

BENGALURU

GAY RUNNERS AND BREAKFAST

Sun, 8:30 am to noon

Gay runners meet at Cubbon Park and Airlines

Hotel Contact: 98450-01168

SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Thur, 7-9pm

Good As You is a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender support group.

Mail goodasyoublr@gmail.com

KARNATAKA QUEER HABBA

6 Oct- 27 Nov

A series of events culminating in the Pride Parade on 27th Nov. iINCLUDES Pride Gear and Poster Making Workshops, Pride Benefit EventS, Love Across Boundaries – a Panel Discussion with LGBT and other activist groups about love across boundaries of gender, sexuality, class, caste, religion etc and how the right to such love is pitted against what is seemingly 'natural', A week long exhibition of visual art from the community and other artists on body image, gender perceptions and sexuality, at 1 Shanthi Road. Includes a book release and a book reading. On love, relationships and identities, Bengaluru Pride Mela- A festival space with stall, an open mic, fun and games. We Air Our Shorts- screening of short amateur films on gender and sexuality made by LGBT people in Bengaluru. Reflections and Post-377 Priorities- A panel discussion on what we have achieved so far as a community, and what our priorities and issues are, in the coming years. Drama Baazi- short multilingual staged and street plays on gender and sexuality and finally the Bengaluru Pride March 2010.

For more information visit the website www.BangalorePride.com

Helplines

NAZ DOST HELPLINE FOR GAY MEN.

Monday to Saturday 1-7 pm

The Naz Foundation also hosts weekly meetings and support groups for men.

Call for details (011-2981-2287)

SANGINI HELPLINE

Tuesday noon 3 pm, Friday 6-8 pm

Sangini provides confidential advice for women who are attracted to women.

Call for details (011-6567-6450)

ICWO LESBIAN HELPLINE (CHENNAI)

Monday – Friday 9.00 AM to 6.00 PM

A dedicated helpline for Lesbians by the ICWO (Indian community welfare organization) in association with Action Aid

Call for details (044-6551-5742)

TARSHI HELPLINE

Monday-Wednesday 10 am-4 pm

Confidential and anonymous counseling and referrals on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights issues.

Call for details (011-2437-2229)

ALTERNATIVE LAW FORUM.

Mon- Fri, 9:30 am- 6:30 pm

The forum provides legal services related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender rights.

122/4, Infantry Road, Bengaluru
(2286-8757)

LAWYERS' COLLECTIVE

Mon-Fri, 9am – 6pm

This collective works on issues related to discrimination on grounds of HIV and AIDS

First floor, 4A- MAH Road, Tasker Town, Shivajinagar, Bengaluru
(4123-4130)

LESBIT

Sat 3:30- 6:30 pm, Sun 11:30 am – 6:30 pm

LESBIT is an organization that offers counseling for lesbians and the transgender community

Call for details (99452-31493)

Last Word: To do and Not to do!

SHASHANK SALVE

Hi to all you naughty butts out there. Well I'm finally given a chance to write my first article for the magazine, so I thought to write about something that is most important for all of us: S-E-X.

Sex isn't taboo, so please don't feel shy or bad about discussing it with your "Oh So Mr. Perfect" or any of those "Just another guy"... anyway, out of my experiences I've found a couple of What to and What not to Do or Say, before getting on bed with your that someone special or Mr. XYZ... never feel shy (but that doesn't imply on being too very blunt or in simple word Ms. B****) to discuss about your choices with your partner. Your off bed and on bed choices both should be discussed well before you guys start getting cozy, it makes a difference (trust me!). Enough of that "gyan" now here's what should be kept in mind-

● Please don't over do your make up. Please sweethearts keep it more subtle and real, rather than those flashy eyes and highly puckered up glossy lips. Never wear mascara guys (even if you think it looks cool on you). Please leave it for your mom or your sis; it's not so happening on a date. Never wear a strong deodorant or perfume; you don't want them to look at you thinking, "OMG what is he smelling of?"

● If meeting at a public place, don't just jump onto them or just fall on them (like one of my friends, he does it all the time and ends up with no fun! And then asks, "What did I do wrong??" Duh!). Don't hurry up for everything, which even includes hugging or kissing them in public. They might get uncomfortable and slip out of your hands. Better keep a hold on yourself. Or if meeting at your place make sure your friends aren't home. (You don't want your date to tell you, "Hey do it slowly your friends might be overhearing us.")

● Now don't just jump onto bed with him! Talk to him a little bit (except about yourself and your Oh-So-Hot ex dates!) and try to find out what's going on in his mind and then slowly make your move.

● Start with a kiss. The first kiss is really important, but just don't put your tongue inside his mouth in the very first kiss. PLEASE!! It makes you look like a under training newbie or rather a Ms. Desperate. Take a little time for it, and try to figure out if he's comfortable with it.

● But in case before you kiss him (or after it) you find out that he has a bad breath (which undoubtedly is worst thing to happen) don't just tell it to him to his face. Ask him if he'd like a drink or something... a mint drink or soda or the drinks suggested in last issue would do (you guys should go and ask my ex for tips. After all these years I still don't know how he tasted so good!).

● Anything worst than bad breath? Yeah there is!! Bad body odor. Ewww!! Now if you realize he smells like a stinking pig (which you could have been with all those strong deos or perfumes) don't make faces baby! Simply pull him under the shower with you, slowly run your hands in his hair and soap him up. Now he ain't smelling that bad anymore and surely must have "grown" even sexier and highly turned on (trust me!).

● Now pull him on your bed once he's comfortable. Don't talk much once you guys are ready for the thing. Do it before you start munching on him or just leave the talks as dessert (cause you just don't want to shoo him away once you're done.)

● Never use the "F" word... Never say "I want to f**k you" or "I want you to f**k me". Instead stick to the basics – with the magic in your eyes say, "sweetie I want to make love to you" or "Oh, I want you to

make love with me." (depending on what your 'positions' are!). And make the best of it!

● The most important of all – don't just blow out, (no pun intended here) if you don't like a position. Don't shout or scream or holler (grrrr) at him and say, "You don't know how to do it". Rather say, "I ain't comfortable in this position, 'please' let's try something else."

● I don't know what all weird positions you guys are going to go and try. But now you guys know what to and what not to do or say before and during sex. But what is more important is how well you behave after you guys are done.

● Above all don't fall in love with him the next minute you guys are done. (Gosh!! It pisses the hell out of me when some random XYZ guy tells me that he loves me and he misses me! Go on! In your dreams dude!). Or please don't introduce him to your friends immediately after having sex with him. He might get a little uncomfortable (no matter if your gang of besties doesn't).

● Now once you guys are done don't just hurry lacing your shoes up. Instead talk to him a little bit and then the 'goodbye kisses' (you don't want him to bitch about you later that you were too "professional"). It surely doesn't leave a good impression if you just do it and try to escape and make lame excuses to leave. (I did it so many times and they hate me Oh-So-much! Never make that mistake!)

Hope this will surely help all you guys ('cause they worked out great deal for me). For any other help, I'm always here. So just turn it up and turn him on! Till the next issue ciao and warms hugs and kisses to all!

FEED ME!



Bengaluru *Pride*

Bengaluru Pride and Karnataka Queer Habba 2010

Call for financial support



The Bengaluru Pride march will be held on Nov 28th, Sunday. The preceding week will be filled with Pride related events, and in fact, so will the entire month of November. This year's Pride is organised through CSMR (Coalition for Sexuality Minorities Rights), which is a collective of many LGBTQ groups, allied supporters and individuals. It is heartening and absolutely awesome to have all the various groups come together to help organise these events. However, we also need to fund the event, and we are primarily looking at individual and organisational donations. Hence this is a call for all of you, and your friends, and your groups, to generously financially support Bengaluru Pride and Karnataka Queer Habba 2010.

For information on how to make a donation, contact Siddharth (DocSid) siddusid@gmail.com